THE VETERAN

Vietnam Veterans Against the War

Volume 48, Number 1 Spring 2018

The Struggle Continues

JOE MILLER

From the National Office

2018 – Another year of terrible anniversaries.

Fifty years since the Tet Offensive, the My Lai massacre, the assassinations of King and Kennedy, a 'police riot' at the Democratic National Convention, and the election of Nixon who continued 'our war' for another seven years.

Fifteen years since George W. Bush's invasion of Iraq, a war that spawned even greater conflicts and continuous casualties to troops and civilians in places many of us could not find on a map. Hundreds of thousands of lives lost! Trillions of dollars blown! And the wars go on.

We in VVAW never thought that 50 years after events that shook the world and made us who we are, we'd still be around. Sixteen years ago we actually began discussions about shutting down.

With the new wars in Southwest Asia, old VVAW members came out of the woodwork, looking to re-up and voice their opposition. Veterans from these new wars began to organize as early as 2004, with the establishment of Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW), now renamed About Face – Veterans Against the War (*see page 20*) .

Today, as the US is engaged in multiple wars and bombing campaigns, the anti-war movement is in a very different place. A whole generation has been raised to expect permanent war as a state of being. Generations of Afghanis, Iraqis and others have grown up in a constant state of war. The war profiteers are in charge. We have a so-called President who is an idiot and a chickenhawk coward. Rabid generals, fools, tools of the transnational rich, and right-wing ideologues like John Bolton are stumbling on global tripwires. Are we approaching another world war?

VVAW's "War on the VA" that we began in the 1970s has now morphed into a battle to SAVE the VA. Members are organizing to combat the obvious efforts at privatization and make the VA a shining example of what health care in the US could be. We need to forge a united front to keep the VA. VA workers, patients and other veterans' organizations must unite to stop the privatization already in progress. VVAW is supporting the "Right to Heal" campaign. We should actively support the group "Fighting for Veterans Healthcare" (ffvhc.org). The traditional veterans' organizations are vacillating and buying into some of the lies about the current efforts at "reform."

We are a bit older, but still not in our dotage. There are things we can do, especially in concert with younger veterans who are and will be victims of the disappearance of a REAL VA.

The suicide epidemic is not going away. The VA is vastly understaffed and unable to handle the load of terribly stressed vets from the Forever War. If veterans do not organize and stand up for themselves, they/we will be flushed into an inadequate, civilian, for-profit series of stop-gap clinics. Big Medical will cash in.

It should certainly be clear to most folks that the economy sucks for us. Profits are through the roof for the rich and powerful, even when their stocks dip a bit. They always find a way to come out on top—on top of us.

And so, the struggles that VVAW has been fighting since 1967 continue. While we are older (and perhaps a little tired), we are still angry. We hope we are also a little wiser. While President Chickenhawk and the Republicans collude to attack all that is decent, we must not let that wear us down. We still have hope; we still have an important role to play in these battles.

We have hope that the new generation of American youth that have grown up under continuous war and increasing gun violence can help lead a new generation into power and more just policies can ensue. We hope that we can impart the wisdom we learned when we were the new kids on the block and are not the old guys on the corner.

We still find inspiration from the struggles of those who have fought back and won. We find hope in the Vietnamese youth who have grown up in the war-ravaged and bombing-infected country we almost destroyed. We have hope that donations we make to these youth can help a new generation,

We are tired, but we have hope for the future.

End the permanent wars! Fully staff the VA! Increase the number of VA facilities!

JOE MILLER IS A NAVY VETERAN, 1961-68. NAVAL SECURITY GROUP, 1961-64. USS TICONDEROGA (CVA14), 1964-66. HELTRARON 8, 1966-68. HE IS A VVAW NATIONAL BOARD MEMBER.

VVAW Continues Investment in Vietnam's Future

CHUCK THEUSCH

For many years, John Zutz of VVAW put together an Annual Beer Fest, often at Milwaukee's Serb Hall. Many VVAW members donated their time and labor to make these events successful. Some proceeds from these events in the early 2000's went to support the Library of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia Project.

The idea of building libraries in Vietnam and Laos was new. It still is. As of 2010, the national government of Vietnam has made dramatic strides with a decree calling for independent libraries to be incorporated in the construction of new schools as well as existing facilities. This was a breakthrough. Indeed, Laos followed its neighbor Vietnam passing a similar directive in 2013.

But the Library Project was well ahead of the curve, being founded in 1999. It was in 2004 that Vietnam Veterans Against the War co-sponsored a Library at Kean Village in Laos' Savannaket Province. This small Village Library continues to this day. The National Library of Laos in Vientiane periodically ships "Book Boxes" the 5 hour journey South from Vientiane to the village, rotating the content for the young scholars of this poor remote area.

VVAW sponsored computer lab, March 2018.

"We Always Come Back"

The mission of the Library Project is rooted in the idea that we always come back. This is the call to action in the post-war period that, while acknowledging the anguish of the past, calls forth a sense of the future. The perfect place to act on this is in the field of education. Like kids around the world, the poverty-stricken youngsters of Southeast Asia continue to show a gleam in their eyes that simply cannot be extinguished by life's trials and tribulations

My Lai

(known as "Son My" in Vietnam)

On March 16, 2018, exactly 50 Years to the day after the My Lai Massacre, Vietnam Veterans Against the War joined hands with the Library of Vietnam Project and the High School at My Lai sponsoring a small Computer Lab there. It was Mr. Hoang Quoc Ve, a Vietnamese veteran and Quang Ngai visionary himself and the Library of Vietnam's first partner back then who believed in the Vietnamese saying that "We cannot change the past, we can

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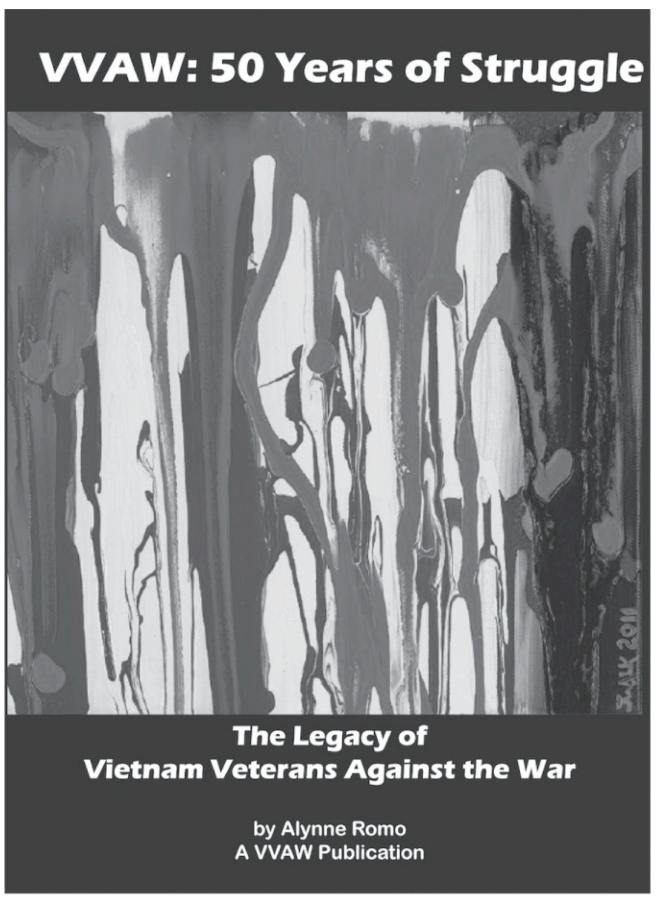


VVAW: 50 Years of Struggle
The Legacy of Vietnam Veterans Against the War

The book describes the moving history of VVAW over five decades and provides a timeline of VVAW's positions, protests, and takeovers. It also sets those powerful actions in the context of each era, starting with topics ranging from the impact of the civil rights movement, to the draft, to flawed operations in Vietnam.

By following five decades of VVAW, the reader also sees the evolution of US foreign policy mired in war crimes and domination; the intergenerational failures of the Veterans Administration; the unfolding of the story of Agent Orange; and much, much more.

The book will delight members of VVAW, but it is also written so that they may be understood—so that others can glimpse inside the world of these anti-war veterans and understand why they stood together and defied the wars, the racism, and the injustices of their times.

Published by and for VVAW, research for the book relied on VVAW archives. In addition to telling the overall history of the organization itself, it also thanks over 450 members who helped drive and inspire the organization. Fully indexed for use in libraries and classrooms.

Available for $19.95 through VVAW's website *www.vvaw.org/store/*.

Truth, it is said, is war's first casualty. Memory is its second.—Tom Hayden, anti-war activist

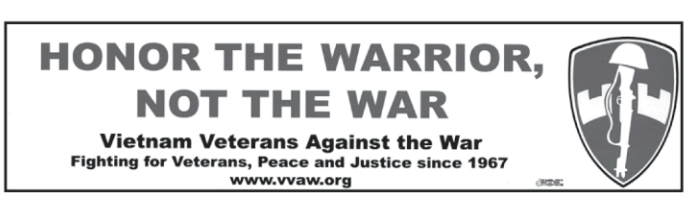
July 4, 1974, Washington, DC.

Veteran Staff

Jeff Machota — Bill Branson
Ellie Shunas — Jen Tayabji

Thanks to Jeff Danziger, Billy Curmano, and Eric Garcia for their cartoons. Thanks to the Poor People's Campaign artists: Aaron Hughes, Yvette M. Pino, Eric Garcia, Sandro Abate, and Eli Wright. Thanks to Chuck Theusch, Joe Miller, Mike Hastie, AFGE, Aaron Hughes, John Crandell, Ben Chitty, Brian Matarrese, and others for contributing photos.

VVAW Merchandise



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Below is a list of VVAW coordinators and national staff. If you need a speaker for an event, class visit, or interview, please contact the National Office at (773) 569-3520 or email vvaw@vvaw.org and we will put you in touch with the nearest VVAW member.

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VVAW Continues Investment in Vietnam's Future

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change the future." And so VVAW has acted on this ideal.

At 9 a.m. The Library Project's small delegation of six—3 American veterans and 3 Vietnamese citizens—attended the Memorial Commemoration held at the site where it all happened 50 years to the day earlier, recalling the anguish of the past. At 2 p.m. the same day, the same delegation went to nearby Son My/My Lai High School and participated in the installation of a small computer lab, a vision of the future for the students of My Lai and its future as a community at the Library Project's building, dedicated in 2013.

Computer Lab

The VVAW Computer Installation and lab features:

- 6 Computers
- Internet
- Hardware Support (2 Years)
- Software Support (2 Years)
- Teacher and Librarian use training
- Information Technology Maintenance and Repair by FPT Corp. Vietnam.

Team Scholarships

The Library Project's "TEAM" Scholarship Program (Together Everyone Accomplishes More) is designed to provide hope in an area where even such a small amount ($25/250,000 VND or $50/500,000 VND) by American standards is a valuable contribution to their futures. In addition, the students take well deserved pride in the Certificate of Accomplishment they receive. This small Library continues to inspire as the Library Project goes back, with additional books and TEAM Scholarships. On October 24, 2017 the Library Project made its most recent visit to the kids there.

On March 16, 2018, VVAW sponsored four students with these Scholarships at My Lai:Nguyen Thi Ha My (sophmore), Vo Thi Thu Ngan (junior), Dang Thi Mai Uyen (senior), and Nguyen Huong Lan (senior).

History of The Library Project

The Library Project was founded on December 15, 1999 at Duc Pho, Quang Ngai Province, Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV). It was the good fortune of the American veteran that sponsored it to find an honest devoted group of local authorities. They, in turn, had an excellent contractor who built a small building with the veterans' plans, drafted in Washington DC by a Vietnamese architect, whom the veteran retained. The basic architectural footprint of this library continues to inspire local construction code changes. It includes special handicapped access, Greco-Roman roof lines and pillars, bathrooms, electrical service geared to introduction of information technology (such as the computer lab VVAW has sponsored at My Lai High school), among a host of other small but meaningful innovations in the essential Public Building Code of Central Vietnam. The original design and specifications continue to serve the school at Pho Thuan, Duc Pho, Quang Ngai Project. American funded visions of the future continue today.

VVAW TEAM Scholars, English students, and Library Project Delegation, March 16, 2018.

The Future of The Library Project's Mission

Vietnam has developed in the major cities, but the places where the Library of Vietnam Project has built these "temples of learning" are still mired in poverty and bedeviled by post-war legacies of landmines, unexploded bombs and exposure to Agent Orange contaminants. At the My Lai High School, War Legacy Risk Education is part of the library's mission.

Beyond that is the incorporation of English language education at the libraries across Vietnam. When the Library Project shows up at any of the 24 facilities it has, from Lao Cai at the China Border to the Mekong River Delta and Cambodia, the children and English teachers light up with appreciation. The future includes a focus on English language training and presentation of native English speakers to the teachers and kids in these regions.

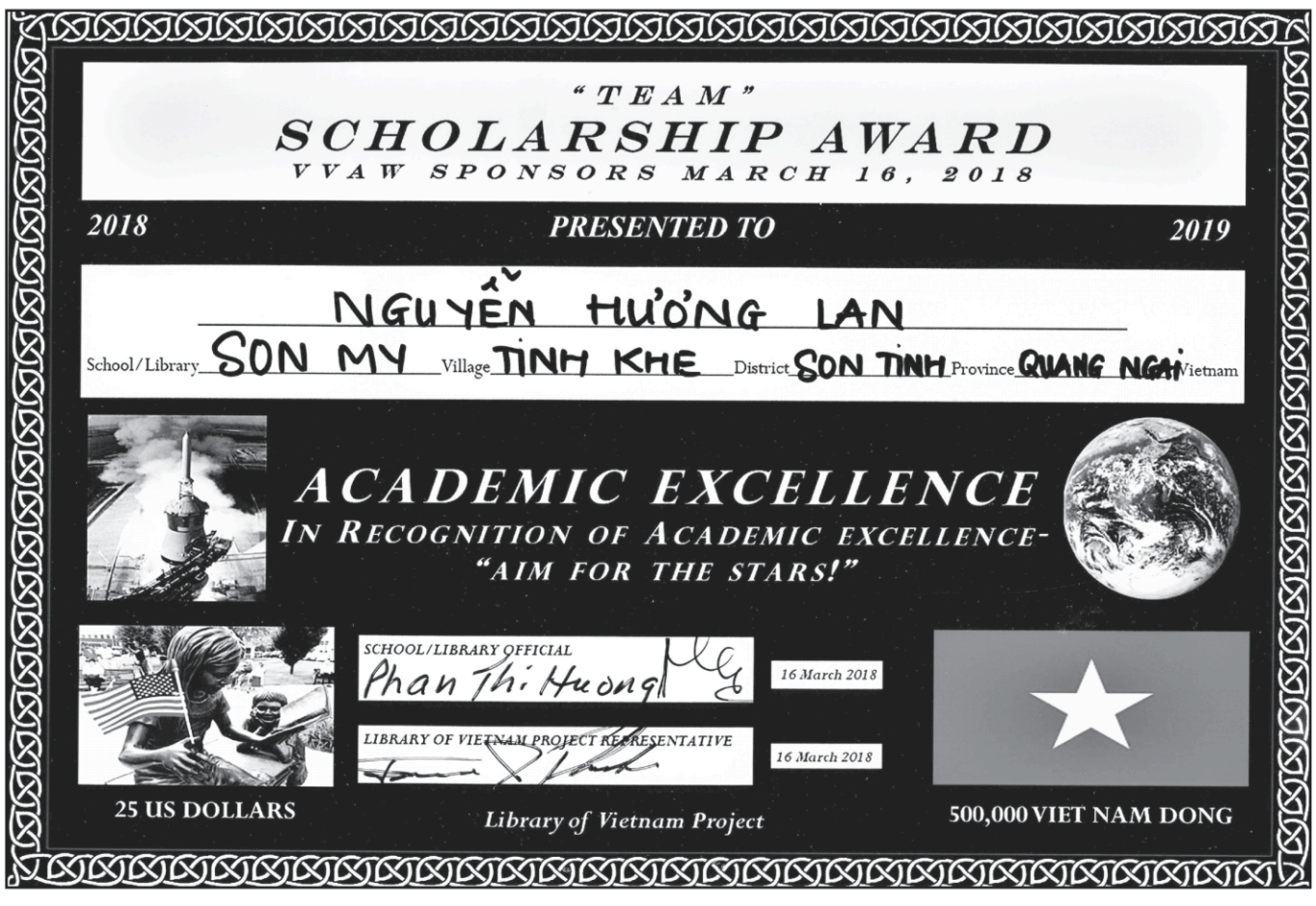
The Vision of Education

Since 1999, the Library Project has continued in its small way to advance the hopes and dreams of the children of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. VVAW's sponsorship of the original village library in Laos, and more recently the installation of the computer lab and scholarships at My Lai High School, speak to the vision of its members and the organization. To support education takes a long view of life, well beyond the here and now intrinsic in the nature of health concerns. It is easy to understand the natural human impulse to invest in support for health care measures such as heart surgeries, and the like.

But there is more to life than a healthy body—it is a healthy soul that complements the body and is essential to living a happy life. The government will always receive local pressure to provide health care, food, water and the like from the population. But it is the food for the soul that a government can more easily set aside remaining oblivious to, and avoid, investing in. That is where we come in with our libraries and dreams of the stars. There are many amputated limbs in the post-war population, but there is nothing like an amputated spirit—there is no prosthetic for that.

VVAW's investment in the spirit answers a hunger in the soul that can starve the healthy body into the abyss of hopelessness. It nourishes the vision of hope that is essential to a meaningful quality of life.

Chuck Theusch is a Vietnam Veteran of the US Army, 4/3 Infantry, 11th Infantry Brigade, Americal Division, Vietnam 1969-70. 1999-present Founder/CEO Library of Vietnam Project, which has built 35 Libraries and Schools in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia.



Fraggin'

Bill Shunas

During Donald Trump's campaign for the presidency, he played at being a populist and pledged he would clean out the corruption and influence peddling in Washington. He said he was going to drain the swamp. Now after more than a year of his being the ringmaster, that circus in Washington has gotten worse. Now the liberal talking heads at places like MSNBC are gleefully accusing him of not only failing to drain the swamp but of raising the water level.

I don't like this kind of talk. Every comparison of the Trump Washington operations to a swamp is an insult to every Spotted Lady Dung Beetle, Northern Cricket frog and Wood turtle in the Everglades. I've been to that swamp in the Everglades as well as the Okeefanokee and Great Dismal Swamps. I've also been to Washington DC. I'll take the swamps.

Unlike DC, swamps play a positive role in our lives. Way back when they used to drain swamps, it was mainly done to expand land for agriculture and sometimes to get rid of mosquitoes because you could get malaria and other diseases from swamp mosquitoes. Once this was discovered and dealt with, the dangers of the swamp largely disappeared. Eventually it was finally realized that wetlands, including swamps, played a positive role in our lives. Swamps are like sponges. They modify flooding and anchor coastal soil and sand. The flooding from Hurricane Katrina did more damage than it could have because the swamps around New Orleans were mostly gone. The sponge was gone. Swamps also act as sort of a water treatment plant that filters waste including the chemicals we like to dump. About four or five decades ago the value of swamps became accepted and efforts began to be made to protect them although the current administration is okay with those protections disappearing.

Okay. Enough with defending the swamps. I get it. You'd rather compare the current occupants of influential DC positions to swamp creatures created in Hollywood. Who can forget the Creature from the Black Lagoon? It rose out of the depths like the political career of Donald Trump. In real life with real swamp creatures, I would compare Trump more to the Golden Tortoise Beetle. This beetle changes colors, and when it's ready to mate, it turns to a color similar to Trump's hair. Maybe that's why Trump's hair stays that color. He's trying to mate. Quick! Some aide better call Stormy Daniel's successor. The Golden Tortoise Beetle happens to protect its larvae by covering it with fecal matter. Again a comparison, albeit only figurative. Trump covers his questionable actions and positions with whatever fecal matter it is that comes out of his twitter finger.

Those around Trump also resemble swamp creatures out to scare children. Hell. They scare me. Kellyanne Conway? How about a Red Belly Water Snake? Paul Manafort the American Toad. Then there's the Asian Swamp Eel, an invasive species trying to squeeze out all the other creatures. Reminds you of Steve Bannon. And then the Eastern Narrowmouth Frog. Sarah Sanders? Enough. Enough. I shouldn't stretch this out any further. The reptiles and amphibians of the swamp don't deserve it.

We may not have a swamp in DC that needs to be drained, but we do have a problem. You couldn't assemble a more sleazy bunch of people than you could find if you used you sleaze recommendation app. This is Trump world. He made his fortune by breaking deals and suing people. Doing this has got to involve a whole lot of deception, dishonesty, and disrespect for any kind of laws or norms, and it carried over into his political life, both in the campaigning and the running of the government. He and his friends are getting investigated by the FBI for the 2016 election and collusion with the Russians and maybe some business dealings. He may slither by, but many around him who have played by his business style are getting indicted or flipping. And even those who won't wear prison stripes are looking like the gang who couldn't shoot straight.

I don't know about you, but it seems weird to me that you kind of get the feeling that the FBI is on our side. These are the people that bugged your phone and mine. The FBI are the law enforcers who stood on the sidelines and watched civil rights advocates in the South get persecuted and killed. The FBI are the people who participated in COINTELPRO, the assassination of leftists. And now they're the ones who stand against the barbarians at the gate. Weird, man. Weird. My world is flipped.

Then there's the media. Generally speaking, I have a low opinion. Every once in awhile you have something good like the Watergate story or the Pentagon Papers. However much of the reportage over the years has been slanted according to the whims of publishers, advertisers, and the conventional wisdom. Now, with Trump tweeting before dawn every morning with accusations of fake news, the media is constantly under scrutiny and attack. The Mainstream Media is what stands between us and fake news. We have to stand up for slanted news as opposed to fake news? It's not as bad as rooting for the FBI, but my world is still flipped.

Next thing you know we'll find out that W is appalled by Trump. W and I are buds? What's going on in Washington is a giant clusterfuck. The District of Columbia was created shortly after the Revolutionary War. It was built on a swamp. Too bad we can't let some of that swamp water seep back to filter out the waste matter that's accumulated.

Bill Shunas is a Vietnam veteran, author and VVAW member in the Chicago chapter.

The Last Patrol, 1972.

Leadership Fiasco at the VA

Suzanne Gordon

In the last week of March, after weeks of hints and threats, President Donald Trump finally fired Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) David Shulkin. Since the VA's Office of the Inspector General report on Shulkin's ill-fated trip to Wimbledon in July of 2017, Trump was increasingly displeased with the man whom, he said, would never hear Trump's favorite phrase, "you're fired." Shulkin gave Trump a great deal of ammunition when he got the government to pay for his wife's trip to England. According to Shulkin, the political appointees with links to the Koch Brothers who favored rapid VA privatization were also pushing for his ouster. While Shulkin's record on privatization has hardly been reassuring, it is clear that those in and around the White House want even more rapid privatization than the outsourcing and plans for private sector partnerships which Shulkin favored.

The President has said he wants his personal, private physician, Rear Admiral Ronny L. Jackson, to be the new VA Secretary. Jackson has no qualifications for the job. He has never administered anything larger than a small cohort of staff in the White House. He has spent most of his career taking care of well-heeled, or super-rich politicians and political staff. I recently spoke with a physician who, like Jackson, was a Navy physician, who also saw combat in the Middle East. He expressed his shock that Jackson would even consider the post. It was either a sign of poor judgment or hubris, he said.

Meanwhile, Trump has bypassed Thomas Bowman, whom he appointed, and who was confirmed to be Deputy Secretary of the VA and should have replaced Shulkin as Interim Secretary. Instead, Trump has assigned that role to Robert Wilkie, who served as Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness in the Department of Defense, and who has no VA experience. Wilkie is an ardent conservative who worked for Trent Lott and Jesse Helms. This appointment has generated considerable controversy. Indeed, it's not even clear if Trump has the authority to pass over Bowman and appoint Wilkie. According to the Federal Vacancies Reform Act of 1998, the President only has the authority to temporarily fill a vacancy at a federal agency if the person being replaced "dies, resigns, or is otherwise unable to perform the functions and duties of the office." Despite what the White House, whose relationship to the truth is shaky at best, claims Shulkin insists he was fired.

Meanwhile, in Congress, several bills that could have a huge impact on the VHA are still pending. These are House Resolution 4242, introduced by Phil Roe (R-TN) and Tim Walz (D-MN) and Senate bill 2193, introduced by Senator Johnny Isakson,(R-GA) and Jon Tester, (D-MO). Both of these bills, which have been sadly, supported by some Democrats and veterans service organizations, would hasten outsourcing of VA care, deplete VA budgets, and gradually privatize the VA. They should be opposed by all veterans and anyone concerned with the future of healthcare in the United States.

One of the main reasons the Koch brothers and other ultra conservatives are pushing the narrative that the VA is broken beyond repair is that they want to promote the idea that government can do no good and that the private sector can do no harm. They are adamantly opposed to any government programs and deeply opposed to expansion of government services. They are almost apoplectic about the prospect of any kind of publicly funded, national health program (known as single payer) in the US. They devote millions to amplify any problems that occur in the VA and use even small problems to try to convince Americans that a rational tax-supported national health system would be a disaster. The VA is proof positive that publicly funded healthcare works and works really well. Yes it has problems, but those problems quickly become transparent and with enough funding and resources can be remedied.

Veterans should be calling their congressional representatives to oppose HR 4242 and Senate bill 2193. They should be petitioning their political representatives to fully fund and staff the VA and stop bashing VA employees and the system as a whole. They should also be asking mainline veterans service organizations to delay any action on the future of the Veterans Administration until after the 2018 elections, when, hopefully, Congress will be reconstituted and more of its members will actually believe that it is the duty of legislators to support the democratic institutions for which veterans have fought long and hard.

Suzanne Gordon is the author of The Battle for Veterans Healthcare: Dispatches from the Frontlines of Policy Making and Patient Care. Her latest book, Wounds of War: How the VA Delivers Health, Healing, and Hope to the Nation's Veterans will be published in November by Cornell University Press.

Why I Joined VVAW When I Left the Navy

Dan Lavery

I am a volunteer for Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW) and respond when the organization receives requests from the public anywhere interested in why Vietnam vets opposed that war. I give interviews, send important information on why I protested against that war, and make myself available for interviews in person or by Skype. My memoir, *All the Difference*, was written in large part to show how a dedicated military officer could join anti-Vietnam protests, and work for peace while becoming a civil rights attorney for Cesar Chavez's United Farm Workers in California. I began in support of the Vietnam intervention as I was taught at the US Naval Academy to follow orders without questioning them. The Academy had qualified historians who provided the Defense Department version of why we had to intervene in Vietnam to prevent a communist-inspired insurgency to overthrow a weak democracy. Many of my classmates and friends went to Vietnam and I didn't consider the protests at first to be from people who knew the threat as I had been taught. Then the Defense Department claimed an unprovoked attack occurred on the high seas on two of our destroyers in the Gulf of Tonkin by North Vietnamese torpedo boats. President Johnson had recently become our Commander-in-Chief after Kennedy was assassinated and went to Congress for a Resolution that allowed the military to respond with all appropriate military response to the claimed North Vietnamese blatant attack on our warships. Congress passed the resolution with only 2 votes against it showing we were outraged at such an attack.

A year later when I was a navigator of the USS Oak Hill (LSD-7) about to take 300 Marines to Vietnam, friends confronted me after a softball game on the lies that surrounded the claim that our Navy was the victim of any attack, and certainly not unprovoked. I fought against agreeing with them, and accused them of being soft on communism as my instructors warned was happening in "liberal" America. But my friends stirred interest in me as to what was the truth. I read the *Vietnam Hearings from the Senate Foreign Relations Committee* led by Senator Fulbright of Arkansas. Those hearings exposed the lies our president told Congress. We (our CIA) had sent torpedo boats manned by Norwegian naval officers and South Vietnamese crew to attack the North Vietnamese Coast to try to destroy their torpedo boats and warships pounded them with offshore bombardment. So there was much provocation. The Captain of one of the destroyers supposedly attacked had sent in a message 30 minutes after the claim was made they were attacked, saying it appeared to be from mistaken readings of radar and sonar by crewmen and that the attack never happened! The Navy tried to suppress those reports as secret, but they came out later showing the Resolution was a horrible mistake that led us into the Vietnam War. When I learned that, I began to be more careful and distrusted the defense establishment when it came to reasons for a war our government wanted. I performed all tasks required, took the Marines to Vietnam as my required duty, acted as an assistant operations officer at Subic Bay Naval Base in the Philippine Islands training American military personnel in shooting targets at sea and assisting the war effort from but inside I was protesting and knew someday, when out of the military, would let others hear my protests loud and clear.

Dan Lavery graduated Annapolis, navigated a Navy jet, was carrier qualified, and earned NAO wings in Florida, and then a ship to Vietnam. He resigned, turned peace activist, joined VVAW, and became a civil rights lawyer for Cesar Chavez's UFW, the ACLU, and private civil rights practice. His memoir, All the Difference, describes his change from a pawn in the military to a crusader for justice. www.danielclavery.com

Follow Eric J Garcia at garciaink@twitter or friend Eric J Garcia on facebook.

They Must Have Thought I Was Very Short

Gregory Ross

"Get up," they yelled shaking our bunks. The eighty men in the barracks groggily came to consciousness. The First Class and Chief Petty Officers that had fanned out into the barracks to wake the lower ranked enlisted men yelled, "The perimeter has been breached." They were telling us to muster at the Mess Hall in the center of the base. The Officer on Duty was sending out groups of men as they arrived.

Locals had cut through the fence, dug a six-foot trench along a length of cable, which contained mostly copper and steel wires and small amounts of gold and silver wires. Those who could read "tracks" postulated four men had tied two mules to the cable, then quickly cut both ends of the piece with axes and smacked the mules. It all happened very quickly and the communications on the base were adversely affected, which was a bonus to them or perhaps the main reason for the breach since it was a Communications base. Groups of men were bussed to the Communications Receiving Building, which was about two miles from the main area of the base, just short of the perimeter fence. From there we were bussed along the perimeter road to various remote parts of the base covered with scrub brush and charcoal trees, to check for other cut cables and for Moroccan Nationals.

Officers were armed, but we were not. There were not that many weapons on the base and even fewer flashlights. The Marine guards regularly carried M16s and 45s. The rest of us, about 1,500 men, were ordered not to engage, but get back to the OD as quickly and safely as possible to report. Then, as an afterthought, we were informed that there were abandoned wells, which were just holes in the ground. Soon, heavily armed Moroccan Gendarmes showed up and the OD had them guard the main area of the base. It was 0400 hours, in a charcoal tree forest. There was just a small crescent moon; the same shape as the Arab Nations symbol, a moon we called, "The Enemy Moon."

E-Bert, Magoo, Bear, Too Tall, who we called T2, and I were sent out as a group. We fanned out just enough that we could hear each other. We agreed we would call out every few minutes to make sure we were OK. Obviously, none of us had combat training. At some point, Magoo, T2 and I lost contact with Bear and E-Bert. We heard low moaning sounds. When neither Bear nor E-Bert answered any calls, Magoo, T2 and I came together to discuss what to do next. We kept hearing moaning sounds and as we walked towards them, we found an abandoned well, too deep to see the bottom, especially since we had no flashlight. We thought it was the trees making the sounds, but were not willing to take a chance.

Magoo and I stayed. T2 went to report. He was not eager to be in the forest alone, but he had lost the coin toss. After what seemed like an incredibly long time, Magoo and I decided something might have happened to T2 and tossed a coin to see who stayed and who went, neither option appealing. I lost. As Magoo left, he turned and whispered, "Better to be a moving target." I gave him the finger.

The disturbing darkness began to abate. You could not call it dawn, but a scarcely perceptible lightening of the dark. At the point I noticed that change I heard a loud "click" that seemed to come from everywhere, as if God had taken off a world-sized safety. My nerves came to even more attention. I jumped when the Imam began chanting the morning prayers into a loudspeaker from the Mosque in the village outside the base. The "click" was him turning on the loudspeaker.

I began moving fast for the main area of the base. As the forest got only slightly lighter and I got closer to the buildings, I was fired upon, ordnance flying within millimeters of my ears. It took me a second to realize what was happening. I dove to the ground and rolled behind a tree, such as it was; charcoal trees are about like our mesquite or manzanita, more like a large, thick bush. I heard words shouted in Arabic, then French. The voices were, as best as I could understand, yelling at the Gendarmes to stop, that it most likely was an American. Then a voice yelled in English that it was OK, I could come in, I would not be fired upon. Smiling nervously, the OD said that I was never in danger because the Gendarmes had fired above my head as a warning.

They must have thought I was very short.

Gregory Ross was in the Navy, serving in Morocco, Six Day War (1967), Philippines (1968), and Vietnam, 7th Fleet, Gun Line (1969).

My 1968: Exodus and Re-entry

Joe Miller

After six years and ten months on active duty, I was discharged from the Navy on February 3, 1968. I was excited and apprehensive about this drastic, but welcome, change.

Two years earlier, I arrived at my final duty station, Helicopter Training Squadron Eight, at Ellyson Field, near Pensacola, Florida. Being there was made more palatable by the fact that my wife and daughter were with me, and we knew that I was getting out in two years.

I was assigned to the Executive Officer's Administration Office. I was the only military person in that office; the rest of my office mates were career civil servants. This base produced Navy and Marine helicopter pilots, a good number of whom went off to war in Vietnam. Most of the instructors already had flying experience in and around Vietnam, so we often heard their war stories.

Since I turned against the war back in 1965, I was not impressed by any of this. I was more concerned about the "whys" of war, racism, poverty, and dissent. I did not want to hear any more about how many had been killed, who won what medal and why. How many would be left alive, on all sides?

In January 1967 I was advanced to Yeoman Second Class (E-5). I was being pressured to re-enlist. It was like, "Gee, Joe, you only need to put in thirteen more years and you can retire at age 38." I teased one of the retention non-coms when I said I might consider this IF I could be sent back to Taiwan with my family. He could not give me such a guarantee. End of discussion.

In March, the local newspaper, the *Pensacola News-Journal,* slammed Senator Robert F. Kennedy for his recent critical stance on the Vietnam War. Though I had discussed the war with shipmates and in letters home while in the war zone, I never made any real overt public statement. It was time to speak out. However, I did not identify myself as an active duty sailor.

This first public expression of opposition to the war was in a "Letter to the Editor," published on March 19, 1967, under the title "Freedoms Questioned." The title was assigned by the editors.

I took the newspaper to task, point by point. What "freedoms" were we defending in Vietnam? What was the real history of our involvement there? I defended Kennedy's willingness, as an early supporter of the war, to finally admit that the US had been wrong for twenty years! Since it was the paper's policy to print the complete address of any letter writer, I received some hate mail from local "patriots" in this military town.

The letter, along with anti-war remarks to colleagues at an off-duty part-time job at a local department store, brought me to the attention of the local FBI office and the Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI). A fellow worker at the store, a Marine Corporal stationed in Pensacola, told me that investigators visited the store when I was off and questioned everyone about me and my political statements. Soon after this, my boss called me into his office and said he had to let me go... without any explanation. I knew why. I joined the local chapter of the ACLU, just in case.

In mid-May, I was due for a military performance evaluation. These evaluations took place every six months, and they were written by one's immediate supervisor, in my case a Yeoman First Class (E-6) who was the admin assistant to the Executive Officer. According to my civilian supervisor, this guy often visited my office while I was at lunch to take note of the titles of books on my desk.

Here is what he wrote and placed in my service record:

"Petty Officer MILLER is very capable of performing any duties assigned. However, his lack of initiative in performing his military duties and his overt interests in non-military activities is very obvious. He spends all his spare time reading books and publications concerning current world situations, thus devoting only the very minimum of his daily schedule to his professional duties. His military behavior leaves very little to be desired as he constantly acts in the highest traditions of the naval service. His leadership and supervisory ability suffer from his lack of interest in his professional duties. His military appearance is always exemplary. Petty Officer MILLER has a very highly 'self-centered' personality and rarely assumes any role other than 'speak only when spoken to.' Petty Officer MILLER has an excellent command of the usage of the English language both orally and written." [from "Report of Enlisted Performance Evaluation" NAVPERS 792. Dated: 16 May 1967]

Apparently, as a Navy man, I was not supposed to care about "current world situations," even in my "spare time." In my mind, I was already a civilian, just wearing the uniform and going through the motions until the date of my discharge, now less than a year away. I had already taken the ACT in preparation for entrance into college. The re-enlistment counselors no longer bothered to contact me. I was known to be "lost."

This transformation, this exodus from 'soldier' (sailor) to 'citizen' status was certainly gradual, but now it was real and final. I happily signed my discharge papers on February 3, 1968, reentering the civilian world, a world that was much different, as I was, from when I first enlisted in 1961.

Weeks before, the spy ship USS Pueblo had been seized by North Korea. In Vietnam, the Tet Offensive began on January 31st. This was the international context in which my family and I left the Navy and got on the train from Florida to Chicago.

My folks gave us living space until we could get on our feet. Now I had to find a real job in the real world.

Since my dad still worked at the Western Electric Hawthorne Plant in Cicero, I figured I would start there. I needed something while I was attending college. I went to the plant, filled in the job application, and was given a physical. In the end, they denied me a job, claiming there was something wrong with my back. How did the Navy miss this, I wondered? Was this real?

I had to find something for us to live on, since the GI Bill alone would not support the family while I was in school. One day, I just went into the Loop and walked into the *Sun-Times/Daily News* building [located where Trump Tower now stands]. In less than an hour I got a full time job, an overnight shift so I could take classes each day. I was assigned to the communications center of the *Daily News* editorial department. Basically, I was responsible for clearing and maintaining the teletype machines that sent news items to the paper, as well as bringing printed column proofs to the editorial staff.

As for college, I enrolled for the spring quarter at the University of Illinois Chicago campus (mainly called Circle Campus). All students were commuters, since there was no student housing back then. I had never enrolled in college before, but I obtained 72 credit hours from my military service (60 hours came from my Chinese language training). Though that meant I would only need three years to graduate, I still had to take all the basic general education courses, like science and rhetoric. That first quarter was a little rough; I had not been in civilian school for eight years.

For a commuter campus, there was a high degree of political activity at Circle. The level of anti-war activity was pretty high. When McCarthy managed to make a significant showing against Johnson on March 12th, the number of his supporters grew. Celebrities like Paul Newman and Sammy Davis Junior spoke on campus during this period. Once Bobby Kennedy jumped into the race on March 16th, that brought even more students into the electoral campaigns. Outside of electoral issues, there was a strong chapter of the Young Socialist Alliance (YSA) on campus, arguing for immediate and unconditional withdrawal of US forces from Vietnam. All this activity swirled around students who just wanted to go to class. And the war just went on; the bloodletting increased.

I was mainly an observer, surely anti-war, but hesitant to join any organization after nearly seven years in the military. Also, I did not highlight my status as a veteran, even though I was awarded the Vietnam Service medal. Since I had never been in combat, I did not feel like a legitimate veteran at that time. In fact, few outside my family and close friends even knew that I had been in the military. I was just another student, working a full-time job, attending classes, and showing up for any anti-war activity that popped up on campus. To be sure, I can't recall anyone on campus in early 1968 who identified as a veteran, let alone a veteran of the Vietnam war.

Things changed dramatically as March flowed into early April. On Sunday afternoon, March 31st, my wife and I joined friends to attend a performance of Barbara Garson's antiwar/anti-LBJ play "MacBird". Later that evening, as I was getting ready for work, my family and I watched as LBJ announced he would not be in the running for president. Wow! What next, I thought?

Then, four days later, the next shock to the system. On the evening of April 4th, I awoke to the news that Martin Luther King, Jr. had been murdered. Holy crap! What's going on? As I rode the bus to work and got closer to the city, we passed burning structures here and there. These were symbols of local anger and frustration over King's assassination. By the time I arrived at work, the newsroom was in complete chaos as reporters and editors tired to keep up with the volatile situation. Mayor Daley had put out his "shoot to kill" order to the Chicago cops, loosening any possible restraint on their actions.

Next morning, I left work and took the subway over to Circle for class. The campus and the immediate neighborhood was in shock. There were no classes that day. Black students and local residents blocked Halsted Street for hours. I went home to watch the news reports about this national urban uprising; even Washington, DC was in flames. Why

continued on the next page

Grant Park Bandshell, Chicago Peace Parade, April 27, 1968.

Chicago 1968

Larry Craig

The 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago was quite the eyeopener for me.

I returned home from Cu Chi, Vietnam in July 1967. After a serious welcome home government-sponsored beating administered by the hometown sheriff's men in Crown Point, Indiana, I got a job selling legal drugs for Parke Davis. The job came with a big red Plymouth Fury which was my ticket to a fine gig escorting celebrities around Chicago for the Eugene McCarthy anti-war campaign.

Celeb number one was Paul Newman. After the sham voting, Paul was clearly depressed by the nomination of pro-war Hubert Humphrey even though all of the votes in the primaries had been for the anti-war candidates Bobby Kennedy and McCarthy. We both learned that in a democracy, your vote only counts if it is for the chosen candidate. That reminds me of the words of the great black poet Langston Hughes:

I SWEAR TO THE LORD
I STILL CAN'T SEE
WHY DEMOCRACY MEANS
EVERYBODY BUT ME

The tear gas was so freely dispensed that it even got to Humphrey in his room at the Hilton Hotel It was at the Hilton that Arthur Miller, once Marilyn Monroe's husband, joined Paul and me for breakfast. They both had melon while I had the usual, bacon and eggs. Now I'm the only survivor. Go figure. I signed the bill for the campaign and forgot to leave a tip. That still bothers me.

Out in front of the hotel, my now wife, Lynn saw Paul in the crowd and screamed, "Where's Larry?" He turned around to see who was crazy screaming. She must have been crazy because 50 years later we are still together for the children and now grandchildren I suppose.

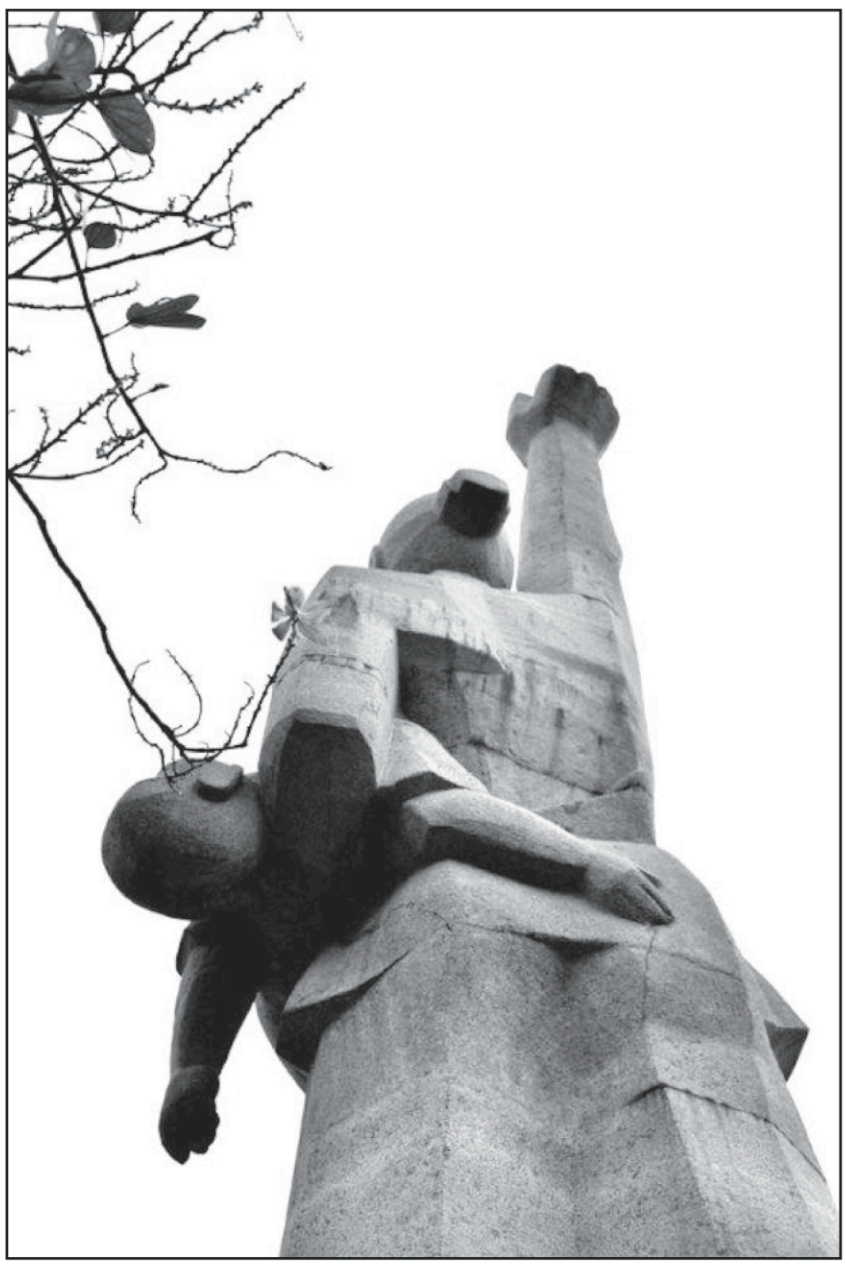
On the way back to the airport, I smiled while Paul moped. He had actually thought the democratic process would win the war. I was such a young jerk. I told him the rich and famous should not have help around the house. At the American Airlines Admirals Club at O'Hare Paul's private pilot showed up looking for $50. Paul didn't have a check so he scratched out my name on my check and it was cashed. The money came out of my account anyway. The banker shook his head at my story and fixed the error.

Larry Craig was awarded the Bronze Star for coverage of Operation Junction City as a writer/photographer for the newspaper of the 25th Infantry Division, The Tropic Lighting News. He testified at the War Crimes trial in Detroit and was in DC for the medal toss.

A Flower at My Lai

It took 4 hours to define the war in Vietnam.
It was a definition that would bring attention
to the world, because the My Lai Massacre
was a metaphor for the entire war.
That is how long it took The US Government
to unspeakably murder 504 innocent civilians.
Bad apples are a cover-up for policy.
Among the dead were 182 women, (17 were
pregnant), 173 children (56 were infants),
and 60 older men.
Empire's finally get caught out in the open,
and the truth is exposed in all of its nakedness.
The lying clothes are removed.
It is profound that a magazine called, " Life,"
would publish photographs on Dec. 5, 1969,
that would expose all of that undeniable truth.
The pictures are graphic, and 49 years later
they still tell a story that continues to define
what happens when greed masquerades as
rightness, and shame is silenced.
Empires bury their history so they can repeat it.
Some pictures expose a thousand lies.
I own a copy of that Life Magazine that was
published on December 5, 1969, so I will never be
fooled again.
Sometimes a flower blooms in just the right place,
to bring one's attention to what needs to be
remembered forever.
It is memory that tells the stories of patterns,
and why truth has to be kept alive.
The flower is like a character in a play,
whose silence makes all the other characters speak.
If one does not speak, or bloom, Power gets away
with madness.

—Mike Hastie



Partial picture of statue at My Lai in Quang Ngai, Vietnam 2016

My 1968: Exodus and Re-entry

continued from previous page

were so many surprised?

Three weeks later, on April 27th, the Chicago Peace Council sponsored a rally and march in opposition to the Vietnam War. This was coordinated with similar events in other cities. My wife Linda and I decided to attend this event, our first public activity against the war since my discharge. We were clueless as to how these things were organized. We just showed up at Grant Park.

I was given a small sign to carry, "Support our GI's! Bring them home now!" We tried to listen to the speeches, but the sound system sucked. So, we just waited for the march to begin. A number of people wore military-style caps that identified them as "Veterans for Peace in Vietnam". These were not Vietnam veterans, as far as I could tell, but more likely World War II and Korea veterans. So, we waited for the march to begin. We were completely new to all this; we had no idea that there had been a struggle with the City for rally and parade permits.

The march began, but we were moving very slowly. Later reports stated that there were nearly 7,000 people there. We would move perhaps a block, then be stopped for a long time.

Finally, being the neophytes we were, Linda and I just decided to "jump the line." We worked our way into the Loop on side streets, eventually getting near Civic Center Plaza (renamed DuSable plaza by the demonstrators). The crowd was enormous, so we were stuck out on the edges. We could hear shouts and screams echoing from the plaza. We had no idea what was actually happening. We would find out later in the news that the police had attacked the crowd. We were probably lucky not to be near the front.

Welcome home, Joe! Welcome back to "the world"! What would happen next in this tumultuous year?

Joe Miller is a Navy veteran, 1961-68. Naval Security Group, 1961-64. USS Ticonderoga (CVA14), 1964-66. HELTRARON 8, 1966-68. He is a VVAW National Board Member

Chicago Peace Parade, April 27, 1968.

Jesus In The Jungle

So far from the Buster Browns
and face of Faberge
steepled fingers lacy socks
and songs we learned to pray.

The disconnect was so complete
the shower shoes on little feet
shishkebabs of Viet meat
some nights still I tremble.

Charlie hit the ammo dump
1 pad, 4 clicks away
TET, my first night in country
it turned night into day.

Our civie undies turned to blue
like black light in the dark
outside the sand leapt in the air
and then concussions arc.

The billets bowed but somehow hold
as shrapnel fell like rain
thank God none had weapons yet
the fear had us insane.

Jesus Christ! Said 40 men
uttered, cried in vain
for when it's raining shrapnel
it keeps prayers short and plain.

I couldn't run for cover
outside it's raining death
if this is courage intro Lord
you win, I failed the test.

We didn't sleep the rest that night
I think it's fair to say
whatever God I brought to war
was now so far away.

— *C. F. Harrienger, Jr.*

THE VETERAN

SECTION B

Volume 48, Number 1 Spring 2018

Veterans and Unions Gain Momentum in their Fight Against VA Privatization

ROBERTO JESUS CLACK

Alejandro Rodriguez speaking at the Right to Heal panel, March 1, 2018.

The Right To Heal (RTH) Coalition held its first public event at Mt. Carmel Baptist Church on Chicago's South Side. It took place on March 1st and brought together well over 100 attendees as part of Chicago Jobs With Justice Workers' Right Board hearing. There were people representing veterans organizations, unions, community and religious organizations, and medicare for all organizers that day.

Started in the fall of 2017, the Right to Heal Campaign has been spearheaded by the 3 major unions representing workers at the Jesse Brown VA: SEIU Healthcare, National Nurses United (NNU), and the American Federation of Governmental Employees (AFGE), along with members from VVAW and IVAW. Originally it was members of IVAW/VVAW and Veterans For Peace who formed the core of the veteran leadership for the Right to Heal Campaign, which is now actively organizing veterans unaffiliated to the 3 organizations, to fight back against Trump and the Koch Brothers agenda to privatize the VA Healthcare system.

As part of the event on the 1st, the Right to Heal Coalition invited well known healthcare author (*The Battle for Veterans' Healthcare*) and VA expert Suzanne Gordon to participate as a keynote speaker. During her remarks, Suzanne made the case that the VA provides superior or equal care that is more cost effective than the private healthcare market. "It would cost $450 billion if 60% of veterans sought private sector providers according to one estimate. To put this in perspective, the VHA budget is $70 billion total."

Gordon would go on to give another example, "It cost $150,000 to get a stem cell transplant at the Seattle VA, where they send veterans to get stem cell transplants. They pay for their airfare, they pay for their family to stay, they pay for their hotel, etc. It cost 1 million dollars to get that same transplant in the private healthcare system."

Panelists would get their turn to speak at the hearing after Ms. Gordon's remarks and both the veterans from the panel and from the floor resoundingly rejected proposals to privatize the VA. Retired Air Force Master Sergeant and Veterans For Peace member, Natasha Erskine said, "I deployed twice, there are some guys who deployed 10 times. The VA is going to get veterans who are even more heartbroken than me when I got back, and I say this as someone who has 11 existing conditions that did not exist when I joined the airforce." Erskine added, "I now say the VA did keep its promise, I love the VA, I am receiving excellent care and there are conditions that did not get addressed until I became a VA patient."

After the panelists finished their remarks, veteran after veteran blasted measures to privatize the VA. One veteran said, "If they can take out the veterans and privatize us and take us out first, after we fought for this country, then social security is next. They have to take out the veterans first."

"We walked out of the hearing with a mandate from the veterans' community to take action on this issue,"said IVAW member and Right to Heal Organizer Aaron Hughes. "We plan to organize even more vets and to take public actions to hold our elected officials accountable to fight efforts to privatize the VA."

While the RTH campaign has many challenges to fight the privatization agenda, organizers walked away with momentum to fight even further. With the firing of VA Secretary David Shulkin, it's clear that this issue requires a sustained response from unions and veterans in order to defeat efforts to privatize the VA.

Along with deepening organizing efforts in Chicago, the RTH campaign is in discussions with organizers from around the country to create a united front to fight back against profit driven motives to privatize the VA. A major event is being planned in Chicago around Memorial Day to bring even more attention to the issue of VA privatization.

ROBERTO JESUS CLACK IS A LABOR AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZER IN CHICAGO AND CURRENTLY IS THE ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR AT WAREHOUSE WORKERS FOR JUSTICE, A WORKERS CENTER DEDICATED TO ORGANIZING LOW INCOME WORKERS IN COOK AND WILL COUNTY. ROBERTO IS ALSO A VOLUNTEER ORGANIZER AND COORDINATOR WITH THE RIGHT TO HEAL CAMPAIGN.

Adelena Marshall speaking at the Right to Heal panel, March 1, 2018.

The Right to Heal campaign met with a staff member from Sen. Durbin's office on Veteran Affairs to discuss the fight against privatization and to save the VA, April 4, 2018.

The Price of Choice

SUZANNE GORDON

The following is an excerpt from Suzanne Gordon's forthcoming book Wounds of War: How the VA Delivers Health, Healing, and Hope to the Nation's Veterans.

To expect that homeless, low-income, or mentally ill veterans with multiple chronic conditions—or the stressed-out family members who care for them—will be able to navigate the medical-industrial complex outside the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), on their own, is a cruel and irresponsible fantasy.

Magical thinking about Choice most dramatically obscures its bottom line. Since Choice was launched in 2014, on a limited basis to reduce appointment days and long trips to VA facilities, the program has had $2 billion in cost overruns. Now President Trump says his goal is increasing the percentage of patients getting some care outside the VHA from 30 to 90 percent. Unlimited outsourcing will bankrupt the VA, first eroding and then eliminating the VHA as a public option for veterans. Choice program legislation, in all its proposed forms, never includes supplemental funding to pay for private-sector care, which will cost far more. That omission is intentional because, according to one estimate obtained by the Commission on Care, if 60 percent of all eligible veterans were treated outside the VHA, the cost of their care would quadruple.

Since that assessment, the San Francisco–based advocacy group Fighting for Veterans Health Care (FFVHC - www.ffvhc.org), which I helped form, has carefully analyzed every congressional proposal to expand veterans' care in the private sector. In each bill, every dollar spent on outsourcing is absorbed by the VHA's own operating budget. No additional funds are earmarked for the exemplary in-house services showcased in Secretary Shulkin's own book, "Best Care Everywhere". As the FFVHC predicts, the result of expanded outsourcing will be cuts in VHA programs, staff, and veterans' benefit coverage.

While Congress was still debating the future of Choice, Shulkin was already trying to cover its mounting deficits and VHA operating budget shortfalls by shifting nearly a billion dollars away from existing programs. As I reported in *American Prospect*, he floated the idea of shuttering ten Patient Safety Centers of Inquiry (PSCI). These VHA facilities have developed innovative methods of reducing suicide and other forms of self-harm, now widely copied outside the veterans' health care system. Only after Senator Bernie Sanders called Shulkin personally, and nationally known patient safety experts like Berwick and Lucian Leape wrote personal letters of protest, did the secretary abandon (for now) any PSCI closing plans. Unfortunately, others, with PSCI's at risk in their own states, failed to respond, including Senator Elizabeth Warren and Congressman Seth Moulton, a veteran himself.

Then, in October 2017, the VA leadership changed course again, issuing a memo giving medical center directors the green light to shift money from earmarked programs to fund general operations at the local level. This move threatened $265 million allocated for the HUD-VASH program, in which social workers find housing for homeless veterans. Other funding at risk included $30 million originally budgeted for mental health initiatives and $21 million for staff assisting Iraq and Afghanistan veterans in their transition back to civilian life.

The authorized funding shifts were expected to impact suicide prevention efforts (notwithstanding Shulkin's claim that they were a top personal priority), spinal cord injury rehabilitation programs, and post-amputation care for victims of disabling injuries on and off the battlefield. About $26 million allocated to Mental Illness Research Education and Clinic Centers was targeted for trimming. These centers do pioneering research on the causes and treatment of mental disorders and translate this knowledge into new clinical practice with veterans. Almost $23 million in funding for VHA occupational health and safety programs became uncertain. This led to cancellation of some already scheduled staff training on how to lift patients safely in hospital and nursing home beds and better handle those who are disruptive. In similar jeopardy were in-house programs to prevent workplace harassment or violence among coworkers, a not well-timed cut in the post–Harvey Weinstein era.

Suzanne Gordon speaking at the Right to Heal panel, March 1, 2018.

After much prodding from female veterans and groups like IAVA, the VHA had launched—just prior to Shulkin's directive regarding earmarked programs—a $6 million women's health initiative. Its advocates now had to scramble to keep it afloat. As the impact of other program defunding was felt across the country—for example, among homeless veterans—both national VSOs and local advocates like Michael Blecker at Swords to Plowshares registered strong objections. Thankfully, the VA was forced to backtrack on its curtailment of services to the homeless.

As the federal government, overall, is deprived of future revenue because of 2017 Trump tax cuts for corporations and the wealthy, conservatives in Congress will make a renewed effort, while they control the House and/or Senate, to curb all "entitlement programs." Veterans will not be immune from this trend, when the debate about the future of Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security resurfaces under Trump. And the potential for VHA eligibility being curtailed or veterans being pitted against other federal benefit recipients is very great.

The VHA's emerging "death by a thousand cuts" requires official camouflage and rationales designed to mollify potential critics. Secretary Shulkin, for example, frequently implied that the agency can best survive and thrive by reorienting itself toward "foundational services" or, in some iterations, its "core mission" (i.e., caring for combat veterans). In his testimony at a February 15th hearing of the House Committee on Veterans Affairs, Shulkin argued that the VA should focus only on what he called "foundational services" like primary care, mental health treatment, geriatrics, and extended rehabilitation. A wide range of other services—cardiology, oncology, urology, etc.—would no longer be integrated or comprehensive. Instead, they would be turned over to private doctors and hospitals. This is, of course, precisely what private sector hospitals are angling for. They don't want to deal with the real wounds of war that require labor intensive, chronic disease management or caring for suicidal or homeless veterans. They want to siphon off the high cost, episodic treatments like colonoscopies or hip replacements. What this strategy ignores is the fact that the unique strength of the VHA, as documented in this book, lies in its unmatched system of integrated care. Plus, it threatens to pit one category of patient against another, undermining the unusual sense of solidarity and community among veterans served by the VHA. If the agency no longer treated those without battlefield wounds, who represent about two-thirds of its current patient population, where would such an institutional reorientation leave many men and women profiled in this book?

What would it mean for sixty-year-old Susi Black, still hobbling one-legged through life, if she were deprived of VHA help because she's not a real wounded warrior? Or thirty-nine-year-old Demond Wilson, who would be literally flat on his back and dependent on local social service agencies or private charity without VHA assistance? Josh Oakley, who never left the continental United States while on active duty, would, according to his own account, be dead if it were not for VHA intervention. How would Norissa McLorin be faring if she became ineligible for military sexual trauma treatment because she was sexually assaulted, stateside, at a base in South Carolina with no less trauma than if the attack by a fellow soldier had occurred in the Sunni Triangle?

All these former service members have medical problems acquired or exacerbated during their military service. Even when those conditions developed long afterward, they were promised health coverage, if needed, when they signed up and made their decision to serve. Should funding of that commitment be withdrawn now? Or, worse yet, should millions of dollars that could be spent on direct care be siphoned off instead through the process of contracting out?

Already, the opportunities for Choice program waste, fraud, and abuse have been well documented. In the future, they may only increase, at further expense to the US taxpayer. In September 2017, for example, the inspector general of the Department of Veterans Affairs sent Shulkin a report on payments to TriWest and Health Net, whose combined reimbursement totaled $649 million. Between 2014 and 2017, the VA contracted with these third-party administrators to set up networks of Choice-approved providers, schedule appointments for veterans, collect medical documentation, and pay provider-submitted bills. The IG's audits found much evidence of medical claims paid more than once, payments that didn't use the correct Medicare or contract adjusted rate, and overpayments to Health Net and TriWest totaling nearly $89 million over a two-year period. Despite this unpromising start with Choice claims processing, Shulkin proceeded to hold secret discussions about merging Choice with the military's Tricare insurance program, which covers active-duty personnel and their families and was formerly administered by TriWest.

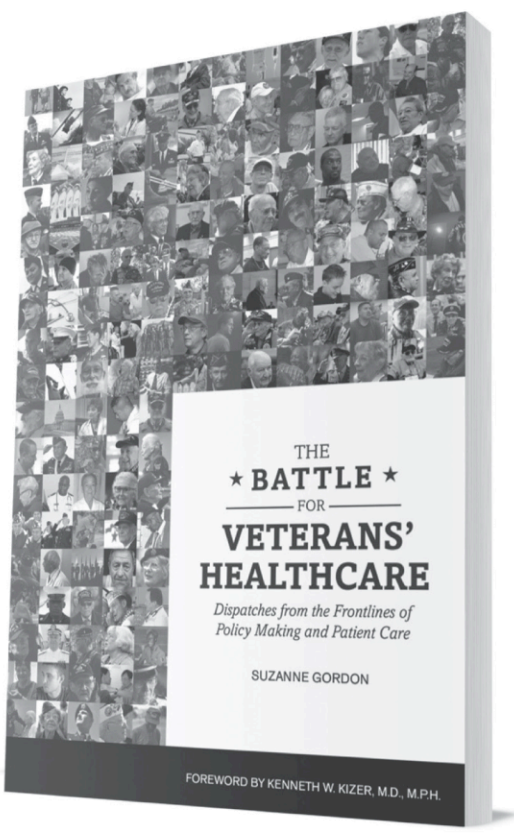
SUZANNE GORDON IS THE AUTHOR OF THE BATTLE FOR VETERANS HEALTHCARE: DISPATCHES FROM THE FRONTLINES OF POLICY MAKING AND PATIENT CARE. HER LATEST BOOK, WOUNDS OF WAR: HOW THE VA DELIVERS HEALTH, HEALING, AND HOPE TO THE NATION'S VETERANS WILL BE PUBLISHED IN NOVEMBER BY CORNELL UNIVERSITY PRESS.

"*The Battle for Veterans' Healthcare* should be required reading for the Trump Administration, members of Congress, and anyone concerned about the fate of the Veterans Health Administration."

—Garry Augustine, Washington Executive Director of Disabled American Veterans

"Suzanne Gordon skillfully rebuts the arguments of would-be privatizers, who are trying to discredit and then divert public funding from health care providers who actually care about their patients."

—Phillip Longman, author of *Best Care Anywhere: Why VA Health Care Is Better than Yours*



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50th Anniversary of the Tet Offensive

John Ketwig

The night of January 30 marked the 50th anniversary of the famed Tet Offensive, often seen as the turning point of America's war in Vietnam. Historians, like America's favorite documentarian, Ken Burns in his recent 10-episode 18-hour PBS TV series *The Vietnam War*, have continued to point out that the end result of the Offensive was a "terrible defeat" for the enemy.

After weeks of intense fighting, American forces took back South Vietnam's cities and towns, killing thousands of Viet Cong and North Vietnamese regular soldiers.

To those of us who were on the ground in Vietnam the night of January 30, 1968, and the days and weeks after, the Tet Offensive felt like another Pearl Harbor. General Westmoreland, the American commanding general in Vietnam, had recently told Congress he could see "the light at the end of the tunnel" in the war. In the central highlands, our patrols were reporting huge influxes of North Vietnamese troops, supplies, and even tanks. It was obvious something big was about to happen.

Years later, a number of America's top military and intelligence leaders revealed that Westmoreland had ordered them to report a maximum of 350,000 enemy troops in South Vietnam, while they knew that there were more than 600,000. The story was finally made public in a landmark *CBS* TV documentary, and Westmoreland sued. The case came to trial in October of 1984. When the good General saw that 28 of his former officers were standing in line waiting to testify against him, he abruptly dropped his suit. *CBS* said it had never intended to question the general's patriotism.

It must be noted that Congress never investigated this issue, and no one was ever held accountable. Video of the *CBS* documentary is glaringly unobtainable. I wish Ken Burns would have seen it.

The Tet Offensive was a bloodbath. Enemy forces went into every significant city and town throughout South Vietnam and sought out locals who had cooperated with the American forces. One of our workers, a delightful old man who burned our human waste every day, was held down while his wife and daughter were raped and then shot, all of his children were murdered, and then he was shot in both arms and both legs and left to die. He survived, but would never be able to work again. In an impoverished society like Vietnam, his fate was worse than death.

On the night of January 30, we were alerted that an enemy human wave attack was imminent, and we would be outnumbered but must slow the approaching army's progress until our ground and air forces could reorganize and prepare to defend the nearby city of Pleiku. We fixed bayonets and waited, hearing radio reports of enemy incursions throughout the country, and Viet Cong guerrillas inside the American Embassy in Saigon. We could see and hear the battle for Pleiku in the distance, the swarms of helicopters firing scarlet streams of bullets from their mini-guns, and the bombs and rockets exploding in the midst of downtown. Our prayers were answered when the enemy force approaching our base turned left and went over a mountain to attack Pleiku from a flank. Throughout Vietnam, the situation was deadly and desperate for weeks. More Americans were killed on January 31, 1968, than any other day of the 11-year war.

The Communists had expected the people of South Vietnam to join their Offensive, and that didn't happen. Over time, their forces were expelled from the cities with very heavy losses, but their movement was not defeated. In the aftermath of Pearl Harbor, American forces fought to take back island after island until they were knocking upon the door of Japan, where two atomic bombs ended the war abruptly. In Vietnam, the war went on for seven more years after the Tet Offensive. Ultimately, like the French before us, the Americans were defeated. It was a dreadful war and a dreadful time for our country.

In Washington, DC, a somber black stone wall contains 58,315 reasons why we must guard against lies, misrepresentations, corruption, and profiteering in our government, our military, our intelligence services, and our defense contractors and industries. Let us never forget what really happened.

As the year 2018 proceeds, we will be reminded of the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Bobby Kennedy, and the chaos outside of the Democratic convention in Chicago. Especially at this moment, we must never forget what really happened.

John Ketwig Ketwig is retired from a career in automotive service and parts management with a number of manufacturers. He is the author of "...and a hard rain fell: A G.I.'s True Story of the War in Vietnam." A new book, "Vietnam Reconsidered: The War, the Times, and Why They Matter" is slated for publication early in 2019. He lives in Bedford County.

Prelude to Tet

Dan New

Three of us, young soldiers, waited in line to board our flight to Vietnam after a week of R&R in Australia. I noticed a newspaper's headline, the large font, bold and thick, PEACE TALKS. It was January 1968.

We boarded the overnight flight. I remember watching a deep violet predawn sky turn crimson red as the sun rose over the South China Sea. Smoke rose from the landscape during our final approach. The heat and stench assaulted our senses once the cabin doors unsealed. When we touched down in-country at Tan Son Nhut AFB, there were only four months remaining of my year-long tour. The trip from the airbase to our billet left us covered with the red dust of the open roads. We reached our bunks and unpacked. The next morning, we reported to our posts. A long flight home at the end of April was my lone yearning.

The first eight months of my time in Vietnam had been uneventful. My assignment at the Port of Saigon, supporting the Army's marine division, comprised of tugboats, barges, cranes, patrol boats, did not call for treks in the jungle. We transported supplies and munitions further in-country to the Mekong Delta and most units south of Long Bien. We were quartered in an old French colonial hotel where the electricity and water delivery were both sparse and erratic. Sniper fire and satchel charges were daily but after nine months of exposure, I had become accustomed to them as only interruptions rather than heart-stopping terror. Our return to the war zone was filled with expectation of a ceasefire and peace talks but there was a change. First an increase in Vietnamese funerals. What had been a once a week event now ballooned into a three or more a day. Stowed in the hearses were the weapons of the coming attacks. Next, dead bodies on the city streets, every day, young men mostly; one to the back of the head, blood pooled beneath their corpse, left strewn for all to take heed. Finally, traffic on the once crowded streets subsided. It happened gradually. I can only recall it now with my knowledge of what followed but at the time, it was barely perceptible.

Counting days to the flight home was what we all did as our time neared. It was a measure of guarantee to check off the days, one by one. When my countdown reached 90 days, it was the early morning hours of January 30, 1968. By then, the weapons and munitions smuggled to supply the divisions of Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army that infiltrated the city were in place. During the predawn hours of that day, the explosions rattled our quarters. Vehicles were heard arriving and leaving the front entrance of our building. The powerful smell of exploded ordnance permeated the air we breathed.

We roused from our bunks, headed to the street, to the action. We were halted at the front door, then ordered to remain in place until further notice. We went to draw weapons from our arsenal only to be told there was no ammunition. It had gone to the Military Police fighting directly with the enemy.

Sniper fire from triangulated positions began by midmorning. We scattered and fell to the floor where we stood as the first round pierced a jalousie window at the head of the long hallway. Before those shards of glass scattered to the floor, the bullet ricocheted off a steel door than streaked down the tiled hallway like a violent skipped stone. Its path buzzed me as I clung to the wall wrapped in the fetal knot. My hands held the steel helmet in a death grip to each side of my head. Wide-eyed adrenaline coursed through my veins. A nasty panic spreading through my being. My senses received pulses of sight, sound, touch, and smell. Each one triggering a more heightened rush of anxiety that causes my mind to quest relief, only to be filled by the deafening detonations from the street battle. Rote prayers roll from my lips. Each moment brings the next wave of anxiety, trapped in this space that had been safe only hours before when I had gone to sleep and counted another day closer to home. I waited for the next round, craning my neck to see where or who the last one hit. I crawled to find cover but there was only tile and a barren hallway. An occasional round pings close by, our progress halts and our sphincters pucker.

Silence followed for minutes or hours while our collective apprehension mounted then another shot reminds us of the lack of weaponry to return fire and defend our position. Choppers circle above and jeeps with mounted machine guns race by the street, never stopping. And we waited while reports trickle through our ranks. After dark, more fire from different angles came to us. Tracer rounds revealed the spot of its origin, but we had no way to respond. Eventually, the sniper fire stopped. While it may have been days or weeks, it seemed forever. The fear triggered in those hours remains in my soul even now, remembered to this day by any scent of abandonment.

Eventually, we returned to the Port of Saigon with loaded weapons. The streets of Saigon remained empty of civilian traffic for many days on end. The bodies of the dead lay scattered throughout the city. The war never returned to its pre-TET condition. Although military leadership declared the victory.

Less than a month later, Walter Cronkite announced his assessment of the efforts in Vietnam. "For it seems now more certain than ever, that the bloody experience of Vietnam is to end in a stalemate. To say that we are closer to victory today is to believe in the face of the evidence, the optimists who have been wrong in the past." Only 63 days remaining for me. As a soldier still in-country, his words seemed a call to forget us. LBJ listened to the broadcast and claimed to "have lost middle America." He chose not to seek reelection by the beginning of April. Martin Luther King Jr.'s was assassinated a few days later. Just 3 weeks and five days to my flight. I had shipped my crate of mementos by then. Cities at home were afire.

My freedom bird lifted from Tan Son Nhut Airbase at the end of April. We landed in Travis AFB outside Oakland in the middle of the night. As I walked through the empty reception area, the sergeants directing us through the gates to our country and handing us our plane tickets home repeated over and over, "Don't wear your uniforms home, it will make you a target."

Dan New is a Vietnam Veteran who served in the US Army 1967-68.

Dave Cline (center) at New York VA protest.

A Tet Remembrance

Chuck Aswell

Tet! That simple word means perhaps as much to Vietnam War historians as "D-Day" does to those of World War II. It signaled the reversal of a war effort that was, until then, quite mischaracterized, to say the least. The notion that the US was making progress in an increasingly unpopular war came to a quick halt as North Vietnamese and Viet Cong attacks rocked US bases and other facilities throughout the country for months.

I was a recently-graduated AIT soldier from Ft. Polk, LA (11B10) in January 1968. I knew, of course, that I was going to Vietnam and that I would be assigned to an infantry unit. But up until about a week before my departure from home, I was at least comforted…a little…by the news of the US success in the beleaguered country. I knew that I wasn't going to a picnic, but not a maelstrom either. January 31st changed all of that. Now, as we sailed over Alaska and the Pacific, many of us knew that this wasn't going to be good. And it wasn't.

When I arrived at Cam Ranh Bay, on February 8th, the reception and transfer base was teeming with activity. I was struck by that. It was like a city in motion…transportation, lodging, processing, food service, security, administration… What an operation! These people knew what they were doing. After maybe 6 days, including a "practice patrol" that was "attacked" (I will forever be suspicious about that!), I was sent on my journey to wherever. We were first sent to the 9th Division transfer point…Bearcat. Then we were put on a Caribou to Tan An in Long An province. From there, we were tossed on a supply truck that took us down a long dirt road through the Mekong Delta to Binh Phuoc, a small village about 6 miles from Tan An. The 5th Battalion, 60th Infantry of the 9th Infantry Division, a mechanized unit, was based in that remote region…and there I was. The 5/60th had apparently been hit hard in Saigon and we were the new recruits needed to fill the gaps. Now what?

My question was answered in a few hours. The next day, I and the other "new guys" were put on yet another supply truck that was headed to Firebase Jaeger, south of My Tho, along Highway 4…the main route from the Delta to Saigon. Jaeger was a typical remote firebase…in the middle of a vast rice plain, protected by triple-wire concertina, and the home of the 84th Artillery which supported operations in the area. It was still February. I was 21. Training was over. I had been drafted and now I was in the mix. It was sobering!

On this very day that I write this, I went on my first ambush patrol in Vietnam, 50 years ago! Our platoon, 1st Platoon, Bravo Co., 5/60th, with maybe 20 guys, set out into the paddies, west of Highway 4, which was only a narrow, dusty road. It was pre-dusk and we were moving along a dike with a woodline perhaps 70 yards to our right. The paddies were dry and the rice harvested, with dry stalks maybe 6 inches high. We were moving in-line with about 10 feet of spacing between us when the burst happened. It was instantaneous, of course, and the mental picture has been indelible…..3 red tracers that seemed to be varied, not in a straight line, about chest high. We had been fired on from the woodline. As it turned out, every guy in the platoon jumped, sensibly, over the dike to the left. My instinct, and inexperience, sent me to the ground fast, on the wrong side of the dike. I was terrified, immediately. I didn't move for fear of being seen and yet I was sure that whoever fired was slowly honing in on me for the next burst. I didn't know what to do. Only much later did I think about how two more steps forward and I would have been cut in half, perhaps literally.

I long ago concluded that whatever team or individual fired on us, they immediately ran away. That was harassment fire, but I didn't know it. I hugged the ground and heard my platoon mates quietly talking somewhere on the other side of the dike. Still thinking that I was about to be targeted, I shouted through gritted teeth in the near dark, "Hey, I'm a new guy and I'm on the wrong side of the dike. What should I do?" The reply was slow and, as I've reflected over the years, quite hilarious…but not at the time. The soldier closest to me surely stifled a yawn and said very matter of factly, "Jump over to this side." That was the only option, clearly, but I needed to be told. So, I dug in my left boot and sprang over the dike, thinking that the sniper was zeroing in on me, and I was soon to be a statistic. Of course, that sniper was pretty much sitting in his hooch by then, drinking some rice tea and sharing a story.

That was the first of a string of nights of ambush patrols. They were always fairly uneventful, but nerve-wracking after that first experience. After perhaps a week or more of constant nighttime patrols, on February 24th, we were told by a sergeant that we were going to stand down that night and have a break. We were all elated to hear this and put the beer on ice blocks and started helmet-baths to celebrate the occasion. Being new, I didn't really understand how rare this apparently was. The guys who'd been around were ecstatic because they had been pushed so hard for so long. So, it was a happy platoon.

However, this was the Army, and about an hour later….maybe an hour before dusk, the orders changed and we were told to gear up and get ready to "go out." Epithets flew and tempers ignited. But we did what we were told and headed out the gate, in line, for yet another AP. Little did we know that by going on this patrol, we may have avoided one of the most significant firebase attacks of the war.

At about 12:45 that night, two battalions of VC attacked Firebase Jaeger. We were positioned maybe a quarter of a mile away and, if sleeping, were awakened by the beginning of the attack. It escalated into a cacophony of flares, 50-caliber fire from tracks, small arms fire, gunships, artillery, and F-4s as more than 500 Viet Cong troops in shorts and bandoliers crawled up to the concertina wire and breached the perimeter. Our patrol was pinned down by the withering fire from both sides, and our platoon was therefore ordered to stay in place. The attack lasted about 3 hours. Twenty GIs were killed, 68 wounded, and more than 100 Viet Cong soldiers died. It was horrific… and the Tet Offensive continued. I had survived near-death circumstances twice within a week. On the 25th of February, while walking through the Jaeger bloodbath, I couldn't help but ponder the fact that I hadn't even been in country for a month yet. It was going to be a long year…I hoped.

I think too often about that period of time. We all have circumstances that could have changed our lives forever. What could be more definitive of life? But I had those few thrown at me so very early. And yet, I am mostly forever grateful that I've had all these years of joy since. I am a lucky man.

Some weren't.

Chuck Aswell lives in Penn Valley, CA, and served in the 5th Battalion, 60th Infantry of the 9th Infantry Division beginning early February 1968. He is a retired teacher.

My 1968 Story

Albert Penta

January 1968 found me on a destroyer at Pearl Harbor. I was a petty officer first-class (E-6) and had over 9 years in the US Navy. A few months earlier, I had filed as a Conscientious Objector at my previous duty station, the University of Washington. The Navy had selected me for a special program, paying for my education to get a degree in oceanography and become an officer. I started as a freshman at the UW in 1964 right after the Tonkin Gulf "incident." I learned a lot of things at college, but mostly I learned what Vietnam and the burgeoning war there was all about. That was the basis of filing to leave military "service."

In mid-January, the answer came back from Washington, DC. My division officer informed me: "Penta, your request for CO was denied. You'll be sailing with the ship when we leave for WestPac next week." Well, the ship left to cross the Pacific, but I wasn't on it. I jumped ship and flew back to Seattle. I was AWOL for a month and finally turned myself in at Pier 91 Naval Base, Seattle.

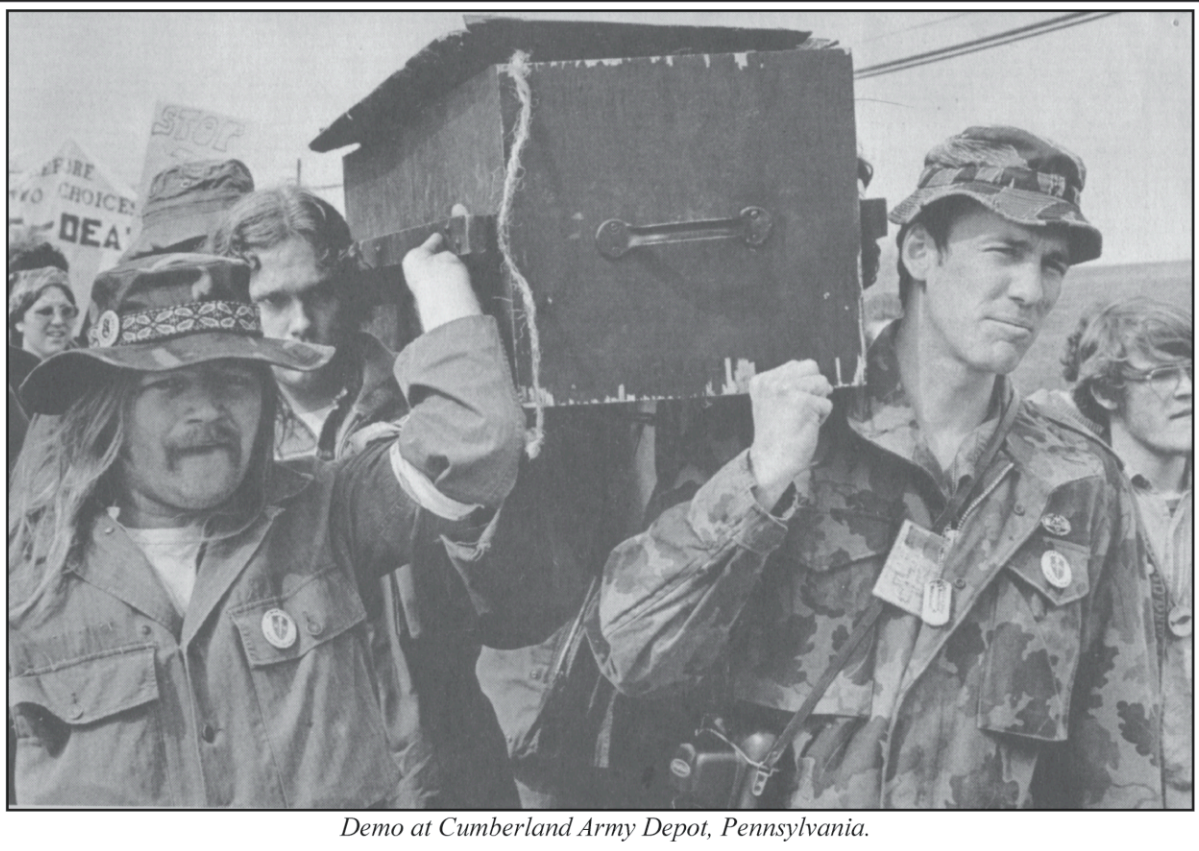
A crusty old World War II warrant officer was on duty and I told him my situation. He became really pissed, calling me an unpatriotic commie: "I'd throw you into the brig, but I don't want you to contaminate the younger enlisted men." So, I got locked up for 32 days in a rather comfortable solitary confinement building that was a former officer's quarters.

In early April at my court-martial, I was charged with 30 days AWOL and the more serious charge of missing the ship's movement. I had a great Quaker lawyer, Bill Hanson, who had helped me the previous year in filing as a CO. The court-martial board was open and sympathetic. Though I was fined and busted in rank, they told me to re-file as a CO and I woul be given a temporary job on base. I was free for every night liberty. While celebrating at home that afternoon with Bill and my family, we got the sad news—it was April 4th, 1968. Martin Luther King, Jr. had just been shot and killed.

The next day I went to get my job assignment from that same old warrant officer. He was really seriously pissed this time: "I can't believe they let you off! You should have been sent to Leavenworth if not sent to the firing squad." He ruminated for a minute and slowly said that he would give me "the most demeaning job possible to shame me in front of everyone." I figured that meant that I'd be scrubbing toilets. But no, he gave the job of "bicycle messenger boy." Wow, what a good gig that turned out to be. For the rest of 1968, I rode a bike all over the base, met other military miscreants—gays, tokers, brawlers, and other assorted trouble-makers. We formed an informal peace group, distributed leaflets, put up stickers, and did general mischief around the base. The Navy never did recognize me as a CO. At the end of 1968, they decided that they would discharge me "at the convenience of the government."

As a veteran, I continued organizing against the war in Vietnam. Fifty years later, I continue my lifelong commitment to anti-war work, for the past twelve years with Veterans For Peace.

Albert Penta, 77, is a US Navy veteran who served from 1958 -1968. He is a long-time peace and justice activist in the Seattle area.



Demo at Cumberland Army Depot, Pennsylvania.

The Year of the Monkey

Joseph Giannini

1968, for all sides, was the deadliest year in the Vietnam War. Over 100,000 American casualties: 16,592 killed in action, 87,388 wounded in action.

In early January the North Vietnamese Army attacked the Khe Sanh Combat Base, just below the DMZ, starting a four-month siege. On January 31, the Vietnamese New Year's Eve, the NVA and Viet Cong launched the Tet Offensive. It was The Year of The Monkey. At the end of April 1968, the Battle of Dai Do started. My tour in Vietnam, as a Marine infantry officer with the First Battalion Third Marines, included all of the above.

Tet started with a heavy barrage of rockets slamming into our positions at the Quang Tri Combat Base. We ran for cover. The NVA were firing 122mm rockets with delayed detonating fuses. We had no defense, only luck. Maybe. I crunched down, making as small a target as possible. Terrified as "Death" walked amongst us. On us. Praying over and over, "God, please, please." At moments, laughing uncontrollably. Close to insanity. Being exposed to death at any moment changes you forever.

The Offensive was intended to end the Vietnam War. NVA and Viet Cong attacked the whole length of South Vietnam believing this offensive would spark a popular rebellion against the Americans and the government of the Republic of South Vietnam. The Offensive was a decisive military victory for us and our allies. Back in "The World," most Americans were shocked by TV coverage of the fighting, brutality, carnage, and destruction. The light at the end of the tunnel was a hellacious fire burning everything.

In early April 1968, we convoyed up Highway One, the only North-South road in Quang Tri Province. We were heading to Route Nine. It ran west past the Marines under siege at the Khe Sanh Combat Base, then on to Laos. Vietnamese girls stood along the road, patting their backsides. Hatred in their eyes and voices. Yelling over and over, "Hey, Marines you fucking number ten." Meaning we were the worst. We had not won their "Hearts and Minds." Our crusade to bring them freedom and democracy doomed long before the first Marines waded ashore.

The NVA had closed Route Nine by Khe Sahn. Then 40,000 NVA surrounded 5,000 Marines and ARVN in a death trap. We moved down Route Nine, took up positions a few miles from the combat base, then waited. I thought all those Marines were fucked. Did not have a chance. Thanked God it was not us. The siege looked like another Dien Bien Phu, a famous battle in the French Indochina War. In 1954, the Viet Minh, now the NVA, surrounded and defeated 15,000 French soldiers, ending that war and jump-starting our Vietnam War, called the American War by most Vietnamese.

The Marines at Khe Sahn, in vicious hill fights, defeated the NVA attempts to overrun the base. Incessant air strikes, including B-52 carpet bombing, killed thousands of NVA laying siege to the base. The Marines held until the First Air Cavalry joined the fight. Then the Khe Sanh Combat Base was promptly abandoned.

The Battle of Dai Do started at the end of April 1968 when the Second Battalion Fourth Marines encountered, on the north side of the Cua Viet River, a large NVA force moving southwest maybe to surprise and overrun the Dong Ha Combat Base. It was the biggest Marine base near the DMZ, bordering on a tributary of the Cua Viet. On April 30, 1968, 1/3, on the south side of the Cua Viet, was ordered to send one rifle company to the north side. Even though my company, Charlie, was closer to 2/4, Bravo got the mission. They were ambushed halfway across. Decimated by AKs, machine guns light and heavy, RPGs, and mortars. They made it across. Within five minutes of landing their Company Commander was killed and the Gunny seriously wounded. Only one officer survived the landing. Bravo had 50% casualties. They held on through the night.

The rest of 1/3 crossed over in the morning. We walked through the positions of the Second Battalion Fourth Marines, aka "The Magnificent Bastards." They had been in a vicious battle with a large NVA force. The Bastards suffered terrible losses. Held a thin green line. We moved forward to continue the fight and came upon a large deep ditch filled with dead Marines, each facing outboard. Everyone was in a fighting position, killed by multiple small arm wounds. The NVA had pulled back without stripping or mutilating them. Our Chaplin climbed down into the ditch. With the index finger and pinky of his right hand, he closed their eyes. Then we went into the ditch, to wrap each Marine in his own poncho. During our advance, we wrapped 55 KIAs from 2/4. All about to start the long journey home. We called this "Poncho Rotation."

While pursuing the enemy we found a lone dead Marine. He had been captured. He was blindfolded and his arms tied so tight behind, his elbows were touching. Shot in the back of the head. Out here, the Geneva Convention did not protect captured grunts. We were not valuable intelligence sources.

We found the NVA. They made a stand and attempted to overrun 1/3. Not good decisions. The weather was clear and sunny. They were massed in two villes surrounded by dry rice paddies. A large Buddhist graveyard extended from the NVA lines to our position. As we advanced, the graveyard provided great cover. We could see them and they us. We fought a deadly stalemate through most of the day. Our Aerial Observer above coordinated our support. Jet fighter-bombers dropping 500 and 1,000 pound bombs and napalm, artillery firing barrages from every firebase within range and Cobra Gunships. The earth shook. The air above the villes became a brown cloud that rose 200 meters. The NVA held their ground. Then started a large ground assault at us in the graveyard. The AO told us to pull back, that he had never seen anything like this. Thousands were coming at us. We moved back several hundred meters under the cover of our supporting fires. The NVA troopers were stopped meters from our new position.

The next morning we moved up again. The NVA were gone. Only a few remained behind, buried alive in their bunkers. We had fought between 8,000 and 10,000 NVA from their 320th Infantry Division. Stopping them and inflicting heavy casualties. Our losses were considerable. As Marines say, "There it is."

Semper fi.

Joseph Giannini is a former Marine grunt who fought in 'Nam 1967-68 with the 1st Battalion, 3rd Marines.

Fifty Years Ago Today

Robert Traller

Fifty years ago today at first light, the siren went off in B Co. 25th Aviation Battalion, 25th infantry division. I scrambled to get my clothes on and ran out to the flight line. I slid open the right-hand door of the helicopter, grabbed my machine gun and snapped it on to its mount. My crew chief Goubeau, "Gooby," had arrived and was untying the main rotor and readying our ship for flight.

In a minute, the pilots arrived jogging with their orders. CWO Szabo climbed in on Gooby's side as Lt. Howe got in the pilot's seat. I slid his armor plate forward and closed his door as he started the engine. I took my seat as the rotor gained speed and the turbine wheezed up to a higher frequency. It was less than three minutes since the sirens had gone off and the ship began to hover to the right to clear the sandbags, nose down and we began to pick up speed.

The morning was overcast. The ceiling couldn't have been more than a few hundred feet. We were following the highway toward Saigon. Gooby and I looked at each other. We didn't know what the mission was. "Must be a milk run," I shouted. He nodded. We were heading toward Saigon, the most secure city in all of Vietnam. Perhaps we were going to pick up some colonel to bring him to base at Cu Chi.

As the highway approached the North end of Saigon and the air base at Ton Son Nhut, I noticed a column of armored vehicles on the highway. Lt. Howe began communicating with a commander on the ground who seemed to be in something of a panic. "Start putting fire down on that row of houses west of the highway," he shouted on the radio. We had just flown over the houses and Lt. Howe began a wide turn to the right. The ground commander explained that his men were receiving a lot of small arms fire from the houses and had to retreat behind the armored vehicles. They were about out of ammo. There was more ammo in the tracks but they couldn't get to it because of the fire.

We turned back parallel to the highway and began firing at the houses. Our ship had a grenade launcher in the nose and fired grenades at the rate of about two per second. We were too low and flat to fire our rockets, but Gooby and I were firing our machine guns. Before the end of our first run, my M 60 stopped firing. As we broke to come around for another run, I was desperately trying to find the problem. I opened the cover and checked the belt and tried to re-cock it but it was no use. We began a second run and I was still trying to get my machine gun working. I could see our grenades exploding on the ground between the houses. I was not doing our team any good. When we broke to come around for our third run, I took the gun apart and discovered the driving spring guide had broken. There was no way I was going to make the gun work.

As we started our third run over the houses I grabbed my M16 from behind my seat and began firing at the windows of the houses below. We began taking a lot of fire. Rounds came up through the floor between Gooby and I. Suddenly CWO Szabo screamed. I looked over and saw he was grabbing his right leg and his pants were already soaked in blood. Unbeknownst to me another round came through the plastic nose of the aircraft, hit the tail rotor pedals and sprayed shrapnel into Lt. Howe's face. As we reached the end of the row of houses Lt. Howe dropped the aircraft down on the ground and flew low and fast over fields before popping us up and landing right in the medical evacuation area of Ton Son Nhut. I jumped out, opened Howe's door, and slid back his armor plate. His face was white and swollen with two or three small puncture wounds in his forehead and cheek. In seconds the medics took him and Szabo away.

It was the beginning of a very long day. A day in which I saw another ship from our company take off with the blood of crew chief Ed Pike painting the tail boom from the door to the tail rotor. It was a very long day and its sights, sounds, and smell became etched in my brain. It was a very long day. In fact, it lasted about a week.

Robert Traller is a retired Engineering Associate at Stanford University. He was in Vietnam from '67-'68. He was active in VVAW in the 70's

February 5, 1968

ROBERT TRALLER

Gooby and I weren't flying our usual helicopter. Ours had been out of commission since the first day of the Tet offensive and we had been assigned a different aircraft. There had been casualties to both people and helicopters and we were paired up with a gunship from a different unit to make a team. Their call sign was Centaur, we were Diamondhead. It was a clear, sunny day.

Flying in the pilot's seat (which was always the right seat in my experience) was Parker, a young warrant officer I had flown with before. He was young but not a rookie. In the left seat was a Lieutenant Henard. I had not flown with Henard before. He had recently come to B Co. from A Co. (Little Bears). While he seemed to be the ranking pilot, he was flying the left seat. I thought perhaps it was because he had less experience with a C model Huey than Parker, but he was in charge of the mission.

I was just an E-4 working as a door gunner. Unless one of the pilots briefed Gooby and me with details about the scramble, we wouldn't know much before we got to where the problem was. When we got on site, the pilots and the ground commander would decide on the target and we would attack it. We were the lead ship with Centaur providing cover. We would dive at the target firing rockets, grenades and machine guns and break away while our cover was still firing at the target. That was the routine. After making a run I heard Centaur on the radio say that they were receiving .50 caliber fire and they were going to pull back.

As far as I could tell, Henard had not heard Centaur. He seemed to be very occupied and focused on making the next gun run. I got on the intercom and said something like "Sir, Centaur said they were receiving .50 caliber fire and they're pulling back. We don't have any cover." I believe I tried to communicate with him at least one other time but he was so focused on making another run that before I knew it we were making another run. I had to get up and start shooting. The target was a building at the junction of a tree line on the edge of rice paddies. As we broke left, I continued firing at the target for as long as I could. We were right about at the limit of seeing the target when there was a tremendous explosion.

I was on my ass in the middle of the floor of the helicopter. I was deaf. My first thought was, "have I lost my hearing?" It was like being alone in the woods in the snow: dead quiet. My whole body was tingling and there was no sound, but otherwise, I seemed to be OK. I looked around. The helicopter seemed to be flying normally which struck me as amazing. I got up to see what had happened. Looking down out the door, I saw bright, white smoke spewing furiously out of the lower portion of the rocket pod. It was spewing down and to the right. I'm not sure how many rockets were in the pod but there were some left. I could see the high explosive heads sticking out the front of the pod. Evidently, there was an explosion in the propellant section of the rockets in the pod. I could not see the damage, only that there were burning rockets and it did not seem like a good idea to keep them attached to the helicopter.

A lot had been going through my head but very little time had actually passed. My hearing was returning as I could hear sounds emerging from a white noise. Everyone's intercom connection was broken in the blast as we were all so tossed about our helmets came unplugged. I scrambled to get plugged in and tell everyone we had a fire on board and needed to jettison the starboard rocket pod. When Henard got plugged in, the first thing he said was "Is everybody OK?" Parker turned, looked at me and said, "No, Trailer's hurt." I looked down and realized for the first time that I was bleeding quite a bit from somewhere on my upper right arm. The sleeve of my fatigue shirt was soaked in blood.

The pilots can't see the rocket pods from where they sit. Dropping a rocket pod with X number of unused rockets is not something they are inclined to do, but I was able to convince them of the danger and we dropped the smoldering pod somewhere in a rice paddy. My wounds were minor. I got a Purple Heart and one day of light duty.

Henard has written a book in which he describes the February 5th action. His account is way more heroic than I remember it and he ends up getting a Distinguished Flying Cross. The book is called "Victory Stolen." I had to read the book because I'm in it. I didn't like the book and I told him so. Dave, I am sure, is a nice person but he is a conservative Christian who thinks the only reason we lost the war is because the politicians didn't have the guts to let the military do their job. After all, we were fighting for the good Catholic South Vietnamese against the godless communists from the North. Then, of course, there were those hippie protesters that spat on us when we came home.

ROBERT TRALLER IS A RETIRED ENGINEERING ASSOCIATE AT STANFORD UNIVERSITY. HE WAS IN VIETNAM FROM '67-'68. HE WAS ACTIVE IN VVAW IN THE 70'S

Honorable Discharge

According to the Veterans Administration,
22 veterans commit suicide in the U.S. everyday.
On a clock, that is one every hour.
tick, tick, tick, tick, tick...
A few years ago I met a disabled Iraq veteran who admitted to me that when he was discharged from the Marine Corps he was put on 14 different medications.
That's 14, not 10 or less.
The Marine Corps was proud of him,
and so was his country,
and so was his family and friends.
Semper Fi
Semper Fidelis
It is a Latin phrase that means
always faithful or always loyal.
Just like your country,
never about betrayal,
never about being left behind.
oo-rah...
The battle cry, meaning " Charge!"

— *Mike Hastie*

The Standard Bearer

A Rapt Evening of May 1968

John Crandell

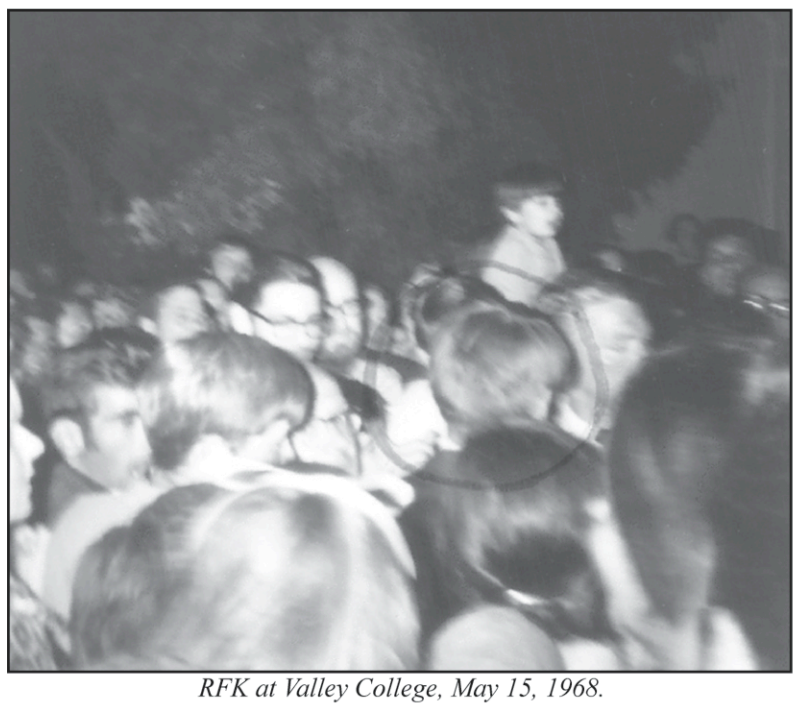
At 5:30 am the alarm woke me. That was the day that I was supposed to go fishing with my dad and his two brothers, the last chance I'd get to see them before entering boot camp. Then the radio news came up with word that Robert Kennedy was in grave condition. Once again, horror. As like my sister having been brutally slain nine months before. Instantly I intuited that I'd put a mark on him down the hill in Van Nuys as I'd reached through a fervid, screaming crowd at a campaign appearance. Such a macabre feeling, to sense down in your bones that you had set death in motion, that it was all your own fault. I didn't fish that day. Dad dropped me off on Broadway in downtown Los Angeles and I set out to try and find Good Samaritan Hospital.

Three weeks earlier, the junior senator from New York had appeared at Valley College. Every year since I've remembered the date - May 15th. And I was young and not yet a renegade Catholic. So I climbed over the rear fence in Sunland to convince Bill Linsley to come along. Kennedy was approaching the apex of his pitched battle with Eugene McCarthy. One year later I would be sleeping among rats at LZ Meredeth in the Central Highlands and still I could not have voted for him. You could go to war but couldn't handle a vote for democracy, whether or not you were young and devoted and came from the "light and space" of California. It was the month which saw the largest conscription and the largest American body count of the entire Vietnam venture.

We left early but to no avail, the place was tightly packed two hours in advance. Youngsters were running from door to door of the men's gymnasium pounding in vain, pleading for admittance. Outside speakers were set up so others could hear the candidate's address. Music performed by the Strawberry Alarm Clock was broadcast, along with Richard Harris' surreal rendering of Jimmy Webb's McArthur Park, the tune which would come to haunt LA in future decades.

After standing and waiting for so long we finally heard a tremendous roar of voices coming up Ethel Avenue north of Burbank Boulevard. So hundreds of us ran over to a high fence to see the star-crossed younger brother. The scene remains indelible: he up atop the back seat of an open convertible with a man in front holding a portable spotlight, the center of an emotional riot. People had swarmed out into the street and all over that convertible! Total bedlam. Young men began scrambling over ten feet of chain link to join the chase. My friend Bill stood back to avoid the stampede while I started to dodge and run along the fence towards an entry gate further north. Then I managed to collide with someone's ten-speed bike and so there I was, down on the ground tangled up in spokes and I glanced back at Linsley and for fifty years now, I've remembered him there amidst the swirl, bent over in convulsive laughter, stomping his foot on the ground.

Then I got up and together we took off running across the volleyball courts towards the drive where the caravan would enter. We stood back as the car passed by, its fenders loaded with kids. Hundreds were running alongside and so many more came swarming across the courts. And it seemed as though everyone was yelling and screaming. I still think of that sole moment of spring as the most electrifying of my life. Over the speakers came an inordinate roar from



RFK at Valley College, May 15, 1968.

inside the gym. So we ran back to the front door where we figured he would enter to speak; we were the first ones there. The car arrived and stopped a minute later and we were surrounded by a youthful mass of humanity. A woman fainted in the crush and was passed hand to hand above the tightly packed throng. From the rear came a chant "We want Gene! We want Gene!" But our crowd was decidedly partisan; the McCarthyites quickly shut up and ran for safety.

Protected by a wedge of bodyguards, he didn't shake hands and they pressed forward through the pandemonium. I couldn't resist, lunged through the crowd and lightly touched his shoulder. Days earlier he'd been mobbed both in South and East LA. Kids had made off with his wingtip shoes and more than one pair of cufflinks. But on that night he spoke on foreign affairs and jokingly asked how many were actually able to vote for him. Not many of us could have. That evening he didn't quote Shaw and shook many hands in taking leave. Then the caravan rolled down the long drive - back towards Ethel - and I watched through the viewfinder of my camera as the car turned out and underneath the overpass which crosses there to the east. He suddenly bent forward with both hands clasped behind his head, down he went into the back seat. An LAPD officer had cleared the bridge only minutes before, yet someone was allowed to return and throw something from above.

One thinks back to that calamitous point in one's life, sees the indescribable contrast to the crude, brazen reality of our present day and can't help but feel that the universe does not smile upon us.

John Crandell is a US Army vet — CONARC, 4th Infantry & 1st Cavalry 1969-1970. He worked afterwards in various jobs in environmental design. Now retired, he is involved in product development and horticultural propagation at 'The Farm' outside of Sacramento, California.

Maggot Days: The Wheels on the Bus

Gerald R. Gioglio

Next stop: Basic Training at Fort Dix, New Jersey. Nobody talked. There was absolute silence on the bus, except for the occasional melancholy sigh or muffled sob—a mausoleum on wheels, a charter bus to the unfathomable. I took a seat about midway that gave me a good view of the rest of the bus. As others entered, I saw that most of the men were my age or younger, kids 18-20 years old with a sprinkling of guys somewhat older, but no older than 26, the cutoff for induction into the Army.

For the most part, eyes were lowered, brows tense, lips taut, arms often crossed over rib cages, holding in the pain, trying to ignore the fear, holding back the tears lest someone notice. Once seated, some seemed numb, temporary catatonia in a thoroughly schizophrenic situation. Nobody seemed "at ease," a phrase we would come to know all too well in the next few days.

I could not help but wonder; who were these guys? What were they feeling? Seeing? Thinking? How did they perceive the draft and being drafted? Did they see it as some sort of essential public duty? Was it considered a masculine rite of passage? Did they suspect their two years in the army would predominantly feature "fun," "travel," and "adventure?"

Was it possible that some equated conscription with some modern version of "indentured servitude"—that is, surrendering both freedom and earning power in return for public admiration, status and perhaps jobs in the future? Did they see conscription as something to be avoided at all costs, but ultimately accepted when that fateful "greetings" letter arrived? How many had applied for exemptions or deferments prior to being called to military service? How many were denied legitimate claims for exemption or did not know they qualified for one?

Were any of them questioning the morality or politics of the war? How many were truly opposed to this war? Who among them had serious doubts about the war, their willingness to fight it, or believed that the country was truly threatened by the Vietnamese? Who would stand up against it—and how could this be done? I asked these questions about others even as they continued to spin around in my soul and in my head.

Willingly or unwillingly we all left home. We all left loved ones, perhaps parents, spouses, girlfriends. Some left jobs. Some left school. Perhaps some accepted the draft to avoid jail time. Whatever our thoughts, experiences or perspectives, I came to understand this: all were leaving behind the past—there was then and this was now. Indeed, there was only now. The future was uncertain. In reality, for some, that future would not last much longer.

And yet, nobody believed that... even when they had to.

As we left the city and cruised the New Jersey Turnpike some guys myself included, started staring blankly out the windows—sadly arriving smack-dab in the middle of what combat veterans call "the thousand yard stare." This was basic training for those who would come to see the worst of man's inhumanity toward man, both in the becoming and for some, in the doing.

Some guys slept as the scenery changed from urban to suburban into what was left of rural southern New Jersey, toward the interior, past the green and open space of the Pine Barrens to Fort Dix. I took to watching the cars go by and gazing into the windows at the people going about their daily routines. The words to the popular Simon and Garfunkel song America came to mind, "They've all come to look for America." Indeed. So were we. But unlike the song, many of us on the bus were "empty and aching" knowing perfectly well just why.

If other drivers noticed us at all, the chances are they thought we were on an excursion to some entertainment or sports venue. Nobody who saw us really cared, indeed, except for the boys on our bus the only people on the entire length of the Turnpike who gave a damn about that behemoth barreling along at 60 mph were those of us who were on it. Why should it be otherwise? Yet, in that minute it just seemed like it should...

Now and again a car would go by and I would be blessed with a snapshot of girls in mini-skirts or shorts speeding to points unknown, bare legs snapping me back to some of what was grand and glorious in the world. "The manifest miracle of women" Jeff Porteous, a prisoner of conscience I would come to know, once said.

When I sat back I noticed that some of the guys had loosened up a bit, snippets of hushed conversation rose above the din of tires reverberating over sun-soaked asphalt. I heard no laughing, but the sighs and sobs had stopped as men settled in. Guys behind me were spreading a rumor that ten percent of us were going to be separated out and sent to Parris Island to train as Marines. A couple of guys reacted to this with something like, "Bullshit. If they choose me I'm walking away. It ain't gonna' happen." I found this remarkable, if not encouraging. I thought, wouldn't it be something if many of us just said "No" to the Marines? Clearly, I was not alone in having doubts about the war and what we were being forced to do.

At this point in our journey, guys were letting their guard down if not finding some comfort in our shared discomfort. Small talk could be heard like, "Where are you from?" "How old are you?" So much of it was the stuff of everyday life, folks taking the chance to get out of themselves. Still, we rolled on. This reprieve proving to be false and short-lived... as we would soon discover.

Author's note: This and future Maggot Days submissions are part of a book-in-progress on social justice, especially during the Vietnam War. Feedback or suggestions welcomed at jerrysfo@verizon.net or on the VVAW Facebook page.

Gerald R. Gioglio, OFS is a VVAW member, Secular Franciscan and author of Days of Decision: an Oral History of Conscientious Objectors in the Military during the Vietnam War.

One More Night

Finally the battle ends
Last week all light and noise
Tonight a night like before; dark, quiet

I sit now in silence, troubled
Thinking of life, full of danger,
That echoed off the walls

Remembering the keys of the teletype
Clicking with fury, announcing
The beginning of the Tet Offensive

From my window the sky lit,
As never before, all reds and yellows
The hooch shaking with noiseless vibration

The Star Spangled Banner sprang to mind
Rockets red glare
Bombs bursting air

The teletype clacking again
A classified message requiring
Immediate action, off to HQ

Scurrying across the compound
Rockets, mortars exploding
Outside the compound

Arriving at HQ, greeted by the Duty Officer
No flight out of Ton Sun Nhut
Should be leaving in two days, guess not

Retuning across the compound
Under bright lights of flares
And a rain of tracers

Arriving to the relative safety
Of my hooch, my home
Those past peaceful 11 months

Home again
There are those nights
When darkness is blinding
Now the echo can be heard
Just a memory… the room is silent

Shit; I was scared

—David Sandgrund

Poor People's Campaign | poorpeoplescampaign.org Four Evils Eric Garcia 2017

THE VETERAN

SECTION C

Volume 48, Number 1 Spring 2018

The Emerging Veteran Art Movement Gains Momentum

KEVIN BASL

Artist and Iraq War veteran Yvette M. Pino says that she initially avoided politics in her artwork. One of the original guidelines of her Veteran Print Project, which pairs civilian artists with veterans to produce an original print, was for participants to remain apolitical. Then she got connected with other veteran artists who challenged this idea and her perspective changed. "To tell somebody they can't be political is in a way censoring the actual story," she said about her project in an interview with the *Madison Cap Times*. Now she embraces politically-provocative artwork.

A growing movement of veterans and service members are making art challenging militarism, Islamophobia, sexist DOD and VA policies, military cliches, racism in the ranks, and more. Iraq War veteran Joyce Wagner organized a project in response to George W. Bush's best-selling book of veteran portrait-paintings. Wagner's ongoing Portraits of a Commander encourages veterans to offer a counter-perspective—to create portraits of Bush from their view. Air Force veteran Eric J. Garcia makes social and political hypocrisies easily understandable with El Machete Illustrated, a cartoon he regularly publishes. Two well-established art organizations that grew out of Iraq Veterans Against the War, Warrior Writers and Combat Paper, both now over a decade old, have inspired a handful of veteran writing and papermaking workshops to follow their lead.

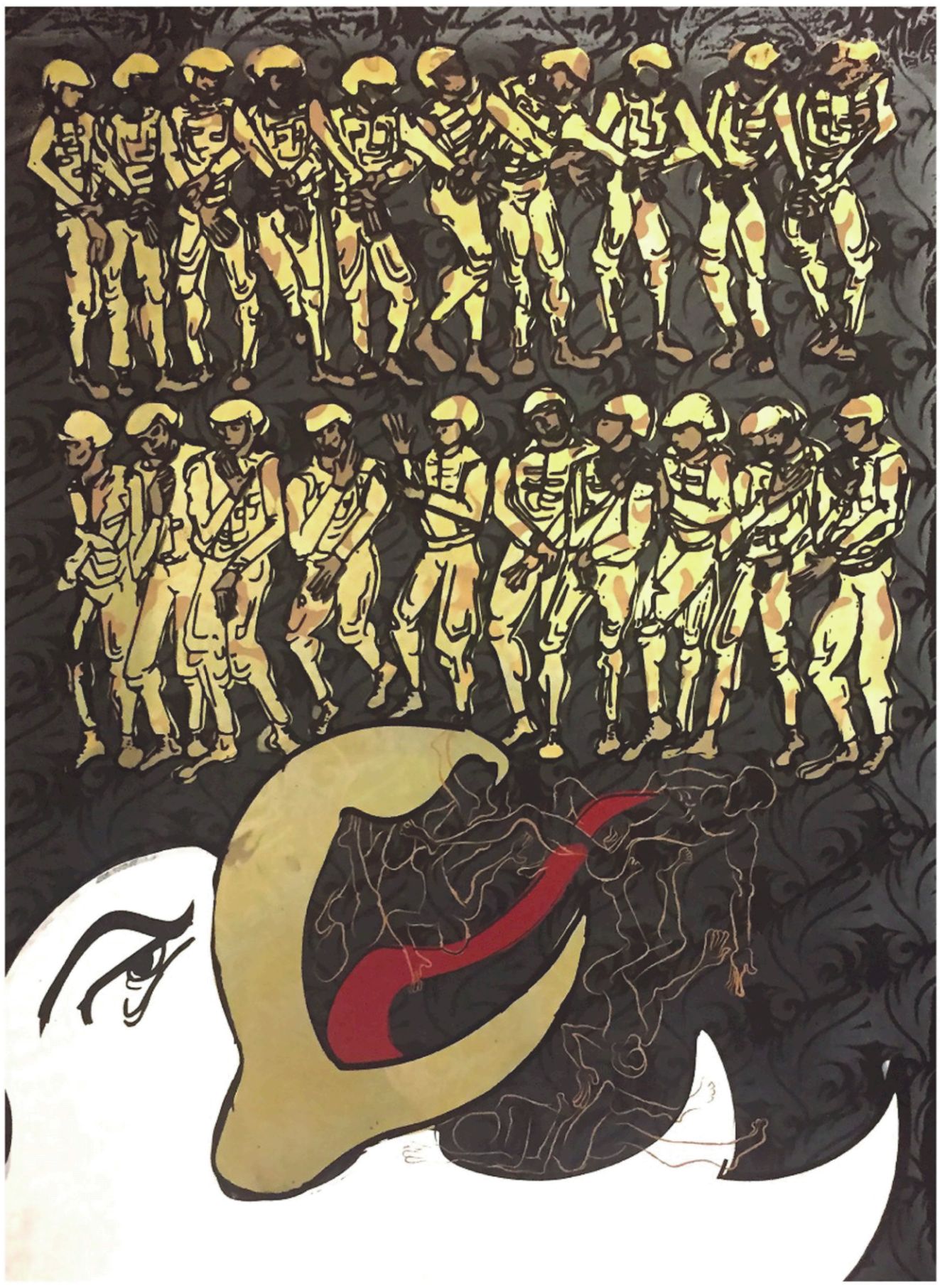
All of these artists are part of the emerging veteran art movement (eVAM). To be clear, eVAM is not an organization; it's a decentralized network. Simply, it's a community sharing opportunities and ideas, promoting each other's work, fostering friendships, and producing thought-provoking artwork. eVAM stands in contrast to the recent spate of arts and media organizations attempting to capitalize on US military "hero worship," some of which clearly exploit veterans' creative labor and social status. For example, We Are the Mighty specializes in the production of military-focused media content aimed at veterans, service members, and military families. In their own words: "[We] capture, empower and celebrate the voice of today's military community." They also boast: "[We] connect brands to the US military." Because they are funded by brands like Boeing, Amazon, NBC, and Major League Baseball, they're a formidable cultural force. Keeping a handful of veterans on their staff gives them a veneer of authentic representation. We Are the Mighty is just one of many such organizations. Not surprisingly, much of the media and artistic content produced by such groups reinforces the very ideas and stereotypes challenged by eVAM. If dissident artists want to get their voices heard in the hyper-capitalistic media and art world, sharing resources and promoting each other's work just makes sense.

Hipolito Arriaga of the Combat Hippies. Photo by Sandro Abate.

Fellow About Face (IVAW) member Aaron Hughes and I spent last year gathering interviews with veteran artists, as a way to encourage dialogue about this growing movement, to share their stories, and to gain perspective on what it means to be a "veteran artist." We released the first six of these interviews in a podcast series called Eighty One Echo (the name is a play on Army MOS 81E, soldiers who "illustrate, draft and lay out illustrations for posters, graphs, charts, tests, and training aids"). Some of the artists featured in the upcoming season include Hipolito Arriaga and Anthony Torres of the spoken word performance troupe The Combat Hippies, poet Brian Turner, ceramicist Jessica Putnam Phillips, and Iraqi-American artist Michael Rakowitz, who has collaborated with several veteran artists in our network. We'll announce others throughout the year.

For more information, visit www.veteran-art-movement.net, where you'll find Eighty One Echo, links to the work of over 50 veteran artists, a list of veteran arts organizations who represent our values, exhibitions, press and other readings about our growing movement.

KEVIN BASL IS A WRITER AND MUSICIAN LIVING NEAR ITHACA, NY. HE IS A MEMBER OF ABOUT FACE (IVAW) AND VETERANS FOR PEACE.



Quiverfull by Yvette M. Pino

Veteran Artists and the Poor People's Campaign Portfolio

Aaron Hughes

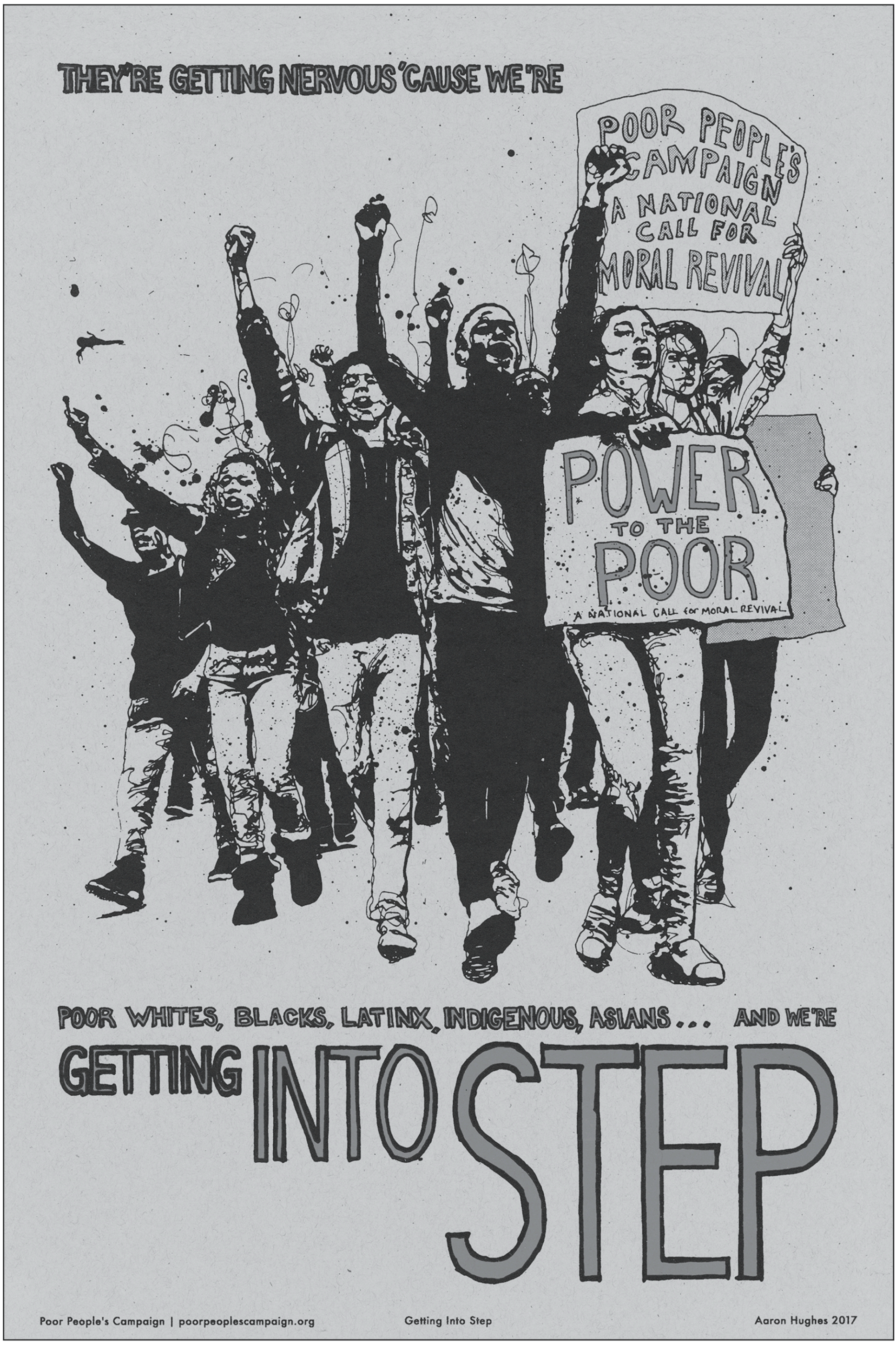
A Justseeds portfolio for the new Poor People's Campaign features veteran artists Aaron Hughes, Eric J. Garcia, Eli Wright, and Yvette Pino.

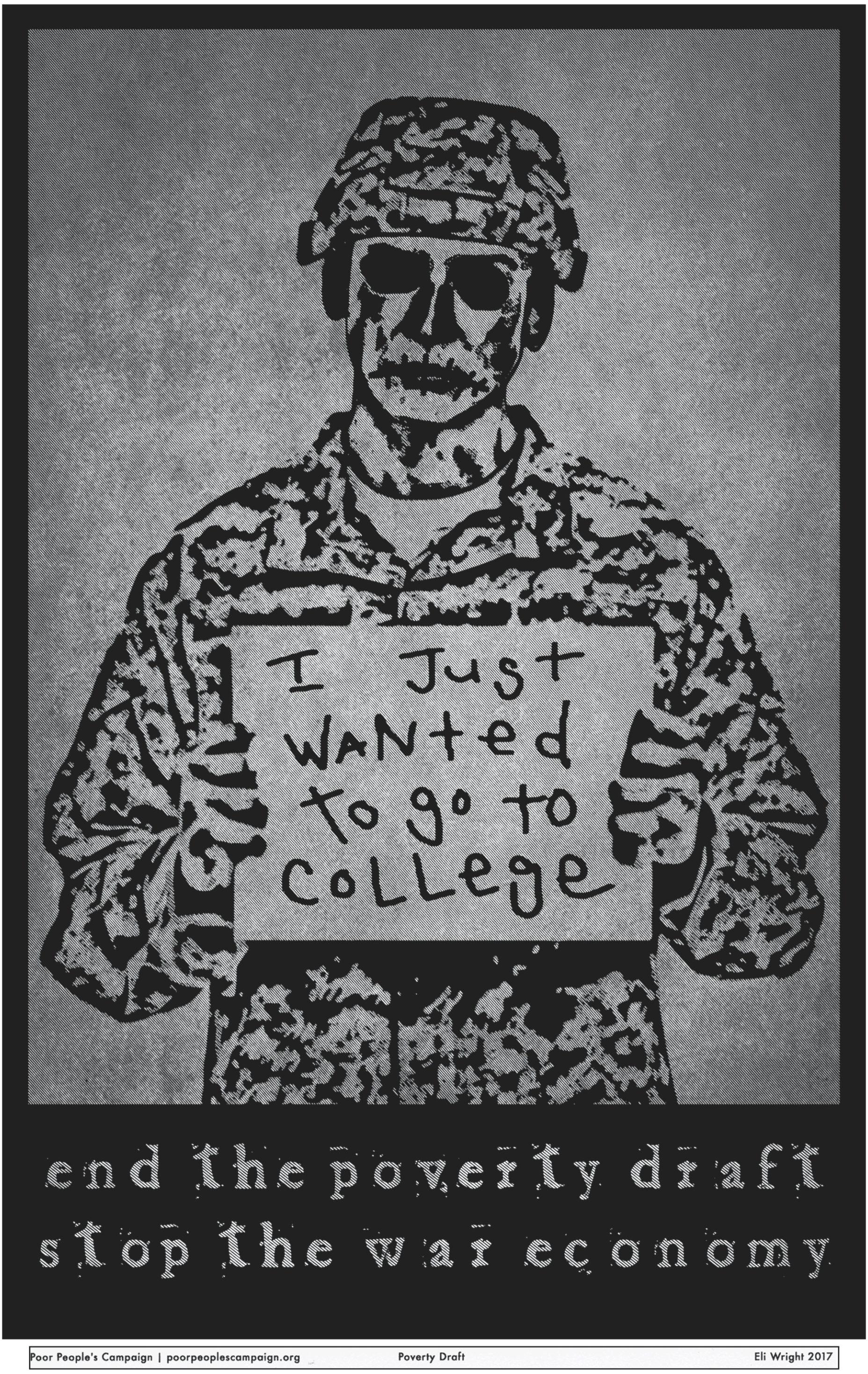
On December 4, 1967, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. announced plans for a Poor People's Campaign and called for the nation to take dramatic steps to end poverty. In the wake of his assassination, the Campaign went forward but fell short of its vision. Fifty years later, a new Poor People's Campaign has emerged from over a decade of work by grassroots movements fighting to end poverty, racism, militarism, and environmental destruction. The Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival is building a broad and deep national movement—rooted in the leadership of poor people—to unite from the bottom up in a Campaign that can bring forth a moral revolution of values to achieve equality and justice for all people.

On the 50th anniversary of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Beyond Vietnam speech, organizers from the new Poor People's Campaign reached out to artists across the country with a general call for artwork addressing the themes central to the Campaign. Justseeds Artists' Cooperative responded to the call by setting out to make a popular education portfolio for campaign activists and organizers to use during regional and local teach-ins in preparation for the 40 Days of Moral Action that will begin on Mother's Day, May 13, 2018. The resulting Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival Portfolio features twenty-five screenprints by twenty-four artists that express the fundamental principles and core concepts that guide the work of the new Poor People's Campaign.

A selection of the prints by veteran artists Aaron Hughes, Eric J. Garcia, Eli Wright, and Yvette Pino are featured here in *The Veteran on pages 8, 16, 17, 18, and 19.*

Aaron Hughes is an artist, teacher, organizer, and Iraq War veteran, whose work seeks out poetics, connections, and moments of beauty, in order to in order to construct new languages and meanings out of personal and collective traumas. He use these new languages and meanings to create projects that attempt to de-construct systems of dehumanization and oppression.





war, survival, guilt and choice

redemption starts in a dark
nightmare

i can't forget the light behind
my eyes

not only when i sleep
but when i hide

inside

forgiveness bursts a fireworks
display of every choice i made
to survive and it's cost in lives

not dying became a muscle
memory
living a habit to survive
then a habit to forget
then a habit practiced
in a dark nightmare

tears exploding
i choose not to die
at anyone's hand
not even mine
and step into the light
and cry: all i did
was to survive

—Gregory Ross

About Face

Matt Howard

Almost 14 years ago, Iraq Veterans Against the War was formed by 8 veterans who had just returned from the criminal invasion of Iraq deeply disturbed by what they had taken part in. These young veterans had an urgent need to tell anyone that would listen that the American people were being lied to. This war was inhumane and not about winning hearts and minds, or even about finding weapons of mass destruction. In the years that followed, our organization grew from a handful of folks to thousands who who were united in their desire to end the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and build a community of like-minded veterans to take action to end these endless wars. Alongside our elders from previous wars we played a critical role in the anti-war movement by bringing home the costs of war. Inspired by VVAW before us, we held a Winter Soldier hearing on Iraq and Afghanistan, we threw back our medals at the NATO summit in Chicago, and began to organize by doing outreach to soldiers on bases like Fort Hood and letting them know about their right to refuse orders.

As the wars ground on without end—and increasingly ignored by the American people—we realized that our starting point had to change. The wars that we had served in, or in support of, were deeply politicizing for many of us. However, the wars weren't actually the root problems; they were symptoms of something much greater. We understood the root problem was the militarism deeply ingrained in American society, that compelled indiscriminate drone bombings in Afghanistan and MRAP armored vehicles in the streets of Ferguson. The militarism that deployed us to occupations without end, and brought private contractors to the hills of North Dakota to put down the Standing Rock resistance.

That brings us to now. We have shifted our work and our analysis to target militarism at the root. Our mission has expanded, and our name has changed to reflect that. As important as the war in Iraq is to many of us, it doesn't fully represent the diversity of experience of our membership, some who have served in different conflicts and in many different ways since 9/11. We are excited to announce our new name: About Face: Veterans Against the War.

As most readers will know from experience, the drill command about face signifies an abrupt 180 degree turn. That drill movement represents the transformation that has led our members to where we find ourselves today: working to dismantle the militarism we took part in and building deep solidarity with people who bear the heavy weight of militarism in its many shapes. We maintained Veterans Against the War because it describes our members, our continued cause, and because it is a legacy that we know is important to maintain. Our name has changed and our work has deepened but the root of our cause, building a world free of militarism, has not changed. We know that this mission will be difficult and will likely stretch over multiple generations, but we wouldn't be able to take up that mantle if it wasn't for our elders who had paved the way.

Until we insure there are no more Vietnam, Iraq or Afghanistan wars.

Until we celebrate the last veteran of war.

Matt Howard is the co-director of About Face. He has worked in a number of capacities with About Face: Veterans Against the War (formerly IVAW) over the last seven years from chapter volunteer to communications coordinator. He enlisted in the Marine Corps and served in Iraq twice as a helicopter mechanic where he was politicized by guarding Iraqi laborers. He currently lives in Brooklyn, NY.

The Right to Bear Arms

(a found poem)

I. Anno Domini 1789

Typical weapon of the time:
Land Pattern Musket (aka "Brown Bess")
Length: 4 feet, 8 inches
Weight: 10 & ½ pounds
Action: muzzle-loaded flintlock
Rate of fire: 3 rounds per minute in very skilled hands
Muzzle velocity: 785 feet per second
Effective range: 50 yards

II. 2018 Christian Era

Typical weapon of the time:
AR-15 (aka "America's Rifle"*)
Length: 3 feet, 3 inches
Weight: 7 & ½ pounds
Action: semi-automatic with 10, 20, or 30-round magazine
Rate of fire: 60 rounds a minute (in the hands of a rank amateur)
120 rounds a minute (in the hands of an adrenalin-charged killer)
Muzzle velocity: 3,300 feet per second
Effective range: 600 meters

*nickname coined by the National Rifle Association

— *W. D. Ehrhart*

On Being Frank

Marc Levy

In early 2017 I mailed a hard copy query to a man in upstate New York:

"Recently I published "How Stevie Nearly Lost the War and Other Postwar Stories." The connecting theme is war and its aftermath. I think we both know a little about PTSD. Would you consider writing a blurb? I look forward to hearing from you."

Weeks passed. Two months went by. One night, around 9:30 pm, the phone rang.

"Hello," I said.

"So, tell me. How's Stevie doing?" a mysterious voice asked.

I had no idea who it was, or what he was talking about.

"Who is this?" I asked.

"It's Frank."

"Frank who?"

And we talked. And we talked. Two hours went by. For several months, once or twice or three times a month, Frank called, or I called him. And we talked. And talked. About politics, poets, writers. About things going on, his neck of the woods. Or what had happened to him in the past. Or the present. Or to me in mine. Frank read me his poems. He played music. He told stories. His abiding concern was steadfast honesty, and right action when faced with corruption.

One night I mentioned Peter Kane Dufault. We had met in '97. After travels in Southeast Asia, where I had many adventures, but many flashbacks and crippling anxiety, I spent seven weeks in a PTSD ward in Montrose, NY. Afterward, I couch surfed, a month here, a month there. A friend asked Peter and his wife if the extra room was free. Once or twice a week, for three months, I visited wry, white-bearded, wise and grumpy, well read, still handsome Peter, who lived in a shack in the Hudson Valley woods. We talked poets, books, war, politics. Played chess. From time to time Peter played the guitar, or banjo, or bagpipes. From time to time we walked the conservancy fields or trails. Or I rode his three-speed English bicycle for endless miles on the long country blacktop roads. To Philmont. To Chatham. To the Farm Store. Or we drove in his mud-spattered jeep to a farther town, a three-foot plywood square jammed behind his "pilots back." He'd flown bombers in WWII. The long flights had injured his spine. Peter, an accomplished and respected poet, read my war poems. Trashed all but one.

"Do we need this?" he asked, redlining half the page. "Or this?" Turning the page, "Take this out. Scratch that." Until finally, "This is your voice," he said, clenching the final sheet. "You need to write like this."

"Are you shitting me?" said Frank. "You knew Peter? We were close friends."

In the department of small world, that's as good as it gets. Frank and I stay in touch and plan to meet.

Out of the blue, the other day I had this dream:

I'm with Frank in the jungle so thick it's nearly dark. I say, "Frank, look over there, about 20 yards away, about 20 feet up." Behind tree branches, a kitten, with big eyes, peers at us. Nearby, a crow, or bird of prey. I turn around and say to Frank, "There's something behind you. It's like you have four eyes." The second skull has ocular ridges. The pupils are small and yellow. Frank says, "Well, what do you want me to do?" I say, "You could move slowly, or scare it by moving fast." Whatever it is, it suddenly runs away. Frank and I stand and decide where to go next. Suddenly, the gorilla rushes upon me, biting my fingers, then it scampers away. Moments later the animal reappears and bites my fingers a second time. But we catch it and wrestle it into a large bowling ball bag. I look at my bitten fingers and wonder aloud if I'll need shots. I unzip the bag, look down upon the gorilla, which sits in the dark, and I yell, "Ahhhhhhhh!!" Frank says to stop yelling at the gorilla, which he lets out, or which escapes on its own, and runs through the jungle, to a high dirt hill, where it lifts its head, pounds its chest, and howls.

The next day, January 26, 2018, I read an excellent essay on *CounterPunch* about Frank, an NYPD cop who was shot in the face and still fighting the good fight.

Marc Levy was an infantry medic with Delta 1-7 First Cavalry in Vietnam and Cambodia 1970. His website is Medic in the Green Time.

The Boy Who Played Army

Joe Petzel

He was born into a world that was prosperous, maybe the most prosperous time and place in the history of the world, if you were white and middle class. He was shielded from poverty, he was held in a safe zone where all the basic needs were met. Life felt right side up.

He loved toy guns. They were advertised on TV and most boys loved them. He had a couple of Winchester air rifles, a Colt 45 Fan Action Pistol, numerous other guns, holsters, helmets and play weapons. He would have gunfights with his friends and sometimes had quick draw fights with himself facing the huge front room mirror.

He had numerous fighting sets over the years. These sets had fighting figures and replicas of their environments. There was an Alamo set with the Alamo, the Texan freedom fighters and the Mexican Army, led by the evil General Santa Ana. When he played with it he was usually Davy Crockett. There were US Calvary sets, Civil War sets with the blue and grey soldiers, and Old West town sets with horses, Indians and a metal town with a saloon, bank and sheriff's office. He had many World War II sets over the years.

He spent many satisfying hours playing war, battles, and gunfights with these sets. He also spent many hours watching war, gunfights, and battles on TV and at the movies. These rarely showed blood, maybe a trickle of blood coming out the side of a hero's mouth after a fistfight he had won. There were no blown off limbs, no agonizing shrieks, and no post-trauma.

He and his friends played cowboy and Indian battles. Sometimes they had rock fights. There was another game, a favorite game called Best Fall. One boy would be the machine gunner and the other boys would, one by one, charge the gunner. As the gunner shot the charging adversary, the running boy would try to have a realistic death fall. The best fall in the eyes of the gunner became the next gunner. There were quick falls and "agonizingly" slow deaths after a fall.

The idea of war and gunfights was thrilling. It touched a place in each of the boys that was ancient. He wanted to be in the Army or Marines and fight. It wasn't a patriotic urge. It had to do with DNA, coupled with a culture that glorified male hardness and violence, a violence that was depicted as bloodless, shriekless and had no grotesque truth, a very sanitized violence that made the idea of war appealing, thrilling and meaningful.

He was a Catholic school altar boy, patrol boy, boy scout, little leaguer and varsity high basketball player. He felt passionate about all these things. He delivered newspapers on his bike and as a teen worked at a local ice cream and hamburger joint.

As he grew older his toys and games changed. They were less related to war and violence. But many of the lessons of the earlier games and toys remained. One of them was a lack of fear of going to war. The Vietnam War raged and some of his friends found ways to avoid going to war.

His older brother, whom he respected, told him that the president was lying about the war. He urged him to seek a deferment, he told him he knew of ways to get one. His brother had checked himself into a psychiatric hospital and received a 4F deferment. He also told him that if he went to Vietnam it would be the mistake of his life. He felt confused. He respected his brother's opinions, but he also didn't believe the president would lie, or that our country could ever be involved in something so wrong.

He went to his father, a World War II veteran, to ask his advice. His father told him he should serve his country.

He decided to serve.

The truth of war was shocking. It looked nothing like the old games, movies, and TV shows. There was no glory. There was no thrill. There were evil, shrieking, and grotesque injury and deaths. There were soul-numbing experiences. None of it was glorious or gallant. Death was nothing like the best fall game. Soldiers came home burdened and troubled, with injuries physical and of the spirit. Many didn't come home.

He knew his world was now upside down, he was hanging onto the earth as a dangerous dark gravity tried to pull him into oblivion.

He knew the games he had played, the images they showed him on TV, and the movies were all lies. He knew he was a pawn in someone else's game. He knew he had made the worst mistake he could have made, the mistake of being a cog in a wheel of a truly evil enterprise. He knew he had been fooled, manipulated, and used. He never forgot the evil that his army inflicted on the people of Vietnam.

He came home to an upside down world. A world turned on its head. The "outside" world was turned upside down and his inner world was also.

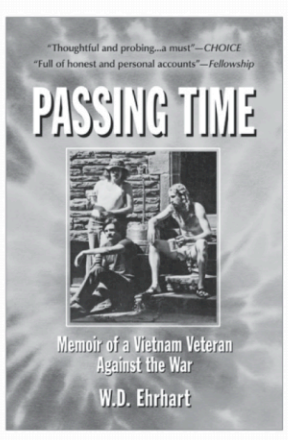
He learned how to operate in the upside down world. He held on from falling into the oblivion with his rage and cynicism, sometimes settling into despair. They were a protection, protecting him from the awful truth he had internalized over there. This awful truth was too ugly and terrifying to stay in touch with. Over time it lessened and eventually his inner upside down world became home. No more play war, no more believing them. An inner shit detector grew that protected him from further grotesque ventures, manipulations, half-truths, and lies.

His life became meaningful, he loved his family and friends. He never forgot the lessons. His earlier mistakes were lessons, not a death sentence as they had been for so many boys. He was loved. His rage lessened to an occasional angry outburst. Sometimes he had to pay the price of depression, anger, guilt, and despair. He tried many remedies for these burdens of the spirit and many of them helped in his healing. He knew he would never be fully "healed." He grew to actually appreciate himself and the gifts he had. He taught his sons and daughter the truth about war. He served his community.

His upside down world became home, no longer threatening him with falling into oblivion. A different kind of gravity held him now. It was a gravity he had discovered. It was his gravity, not someone else's. He actually preferred it to his childhood "right side up" world.

Joe Petzel taught in alternative elementary school for 13 years. Over the last 30 years, he was in private practice, a clinical director in a nonprofit family clinic where he created low fee/no fee services for the local community. He taught graduate level clinical psychology courses and founded a domestic violence treatment center

McFarland



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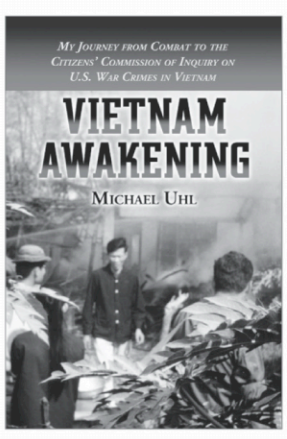

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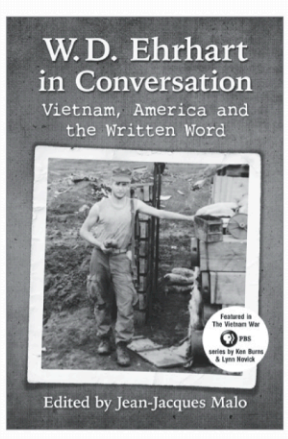

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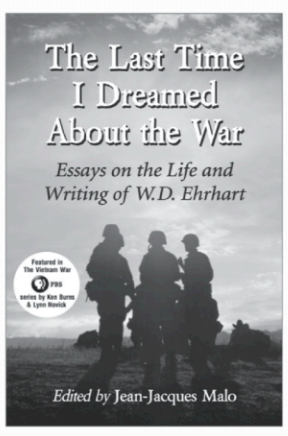

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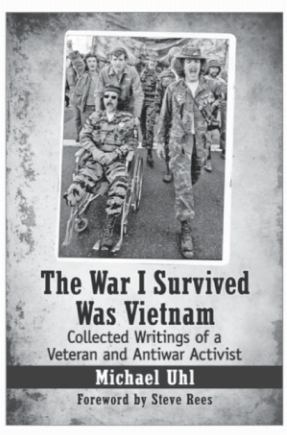

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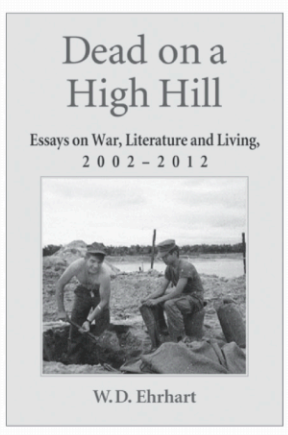

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Percussion, Concussion, Destruction and Death

Gregory Ross

The two principal characters in this true story are Gregory, a Veteran for Peace, and Brutus, a pro-war veteran. In 1967, Gregory, the Veteran for Peace, had been deployed to Morocco shortly after the Six Day War, the first duty station in which he had been fired upon. In 1968, he was sent to the Philippine Islands, where again his life was threatened, and in 1969 to the Seventh Fleet, about a mile off the Coast of Vietnam providing support for ground troops. Gregory's workspaces on board ship were a single deck below one of the big guns: a lot of percussion, concussion, destruction, and death. Brutus, the pro-war veteran, served most of his enlistment stateside with a short deployment to Germany.

The following events happened over the course of about a year. Gregory was chairing a meeting of the neighborhood crime prevention council. Brutus kept pacing behind him, out of his sight, but not out of his consciousness. Gregory asked Brutus to stop walking behind him because it made it difficult to concentrate. Brutus knew Gregory had problems with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Brutus ignored Gregory until he raised his voice and emphatically suggested Brutus sit the "expletive" down. This outburst on the part of Gregory seemed to amuse, even please, Brutus.

Months later, Brutus, in another community meeting, publicly called into question Gregory's right to experience PTSD and in the falsest manner of politeness suggested that Gregory might be exaggerating his symptoms, especially his "startle response." Gregory restrained his thoughts of picking up his chair and bashing Brutus into a bloody pulp. He was, after all, a Veteran for Peace. Gregory, who moved in many conjoining circles with Brutus, had to content himself with false politeness.

Again, months later in the local coffee shop, Gregory was conversing with Rose, a neighborhood acquaintance. Brutus came in and sat down uninvited. No sooner did Brutus sit down than there was a loud screech of tires, which startled Gregory and only Gregory, to the point of a gasp. All three turned to see a man, in the crosswalk, thrown up into the air by a large truck. The man had put out his arms and broke the impact by jumping up. When he came down [he was athletic enough to land on his feet], he bowed an apology to the driver, who Rose and Gregory agreed had been in the wrong. Brutus seemed to have no opinion.

Rose opined that she would have threatened the driver with harm. Gregory agreed. Brutus tapped on Gregory's peace dove with olive branch Veterans For Peace button and grinning a snarky smile said, "Veterans For Peace, huh?" Gregory looked him straight in the eyes and said, "That's right, it says 'Veterans For Peace, not Victims for Persecution.'" Brutus smirked, as if to say, "gotcha" and walked off. Rose remarked, "What an asshole." She got no argument from Gregory, the Veteran for Peace.

Gregory Ross was in the Navy, serving in Morocco, Six Day War (1967), Philippines (1968), and Vietnam, 7th Fleet, Gun Line (1969). Published in Anthology: "Veterans of War, Veterans of Peace" edited by Maxine Hong Kingston.

Coping with PTSD Within and Without the VA

Bill Ronan

As a "Vietnam Veteran Against the War," I spent over two infantry years in Vietnam. It was like joining prison to commit the crimes.

Once released, I sought to understand how our country could get so many of us to go to another country we had never heard of, to kill, or be killed, by people we did not know, for economic, political, and theological theories, about which we were mostly uninformed. I took up the study of propaganda and political persuasion to see if any answers were under those subjects. However, it is very difficult to make a living at teaching propaganda. Propaganda is a subject virtually nobody wants to know about. Along the way, however, I learned a psychotherapeutic method, now called Medical Hypnoanalysis.

Since learning about this method of psychotherapy I have seen many PTSD patients including Vietnam veterans. I found it to be very useful. Medical Hypnoanalysts uses descriptive labels like the "Walking Zombie Syndrome" (WZS) that I and many like me acquired in Vietnam. The tour seemed like several lifetimes and there was virtual certainty of death to any activity in the infantry. It began to seem that death was preferable to existence. Thus, it became natural to feel "dead-like" and this became a coping mechanism. Better to be dead than to be going through what was happening. Paradoxically, that helped many of us to survive. However, I noticed that often toward the end of a person's tour some of us became more likely to get killed. Many had abandoned the Walking Zombie persona and were again excited about life "being back to LIFE in the world." Being a Zombie had, I think, played a role in the survival for many of us, by keeping our minds "in country."

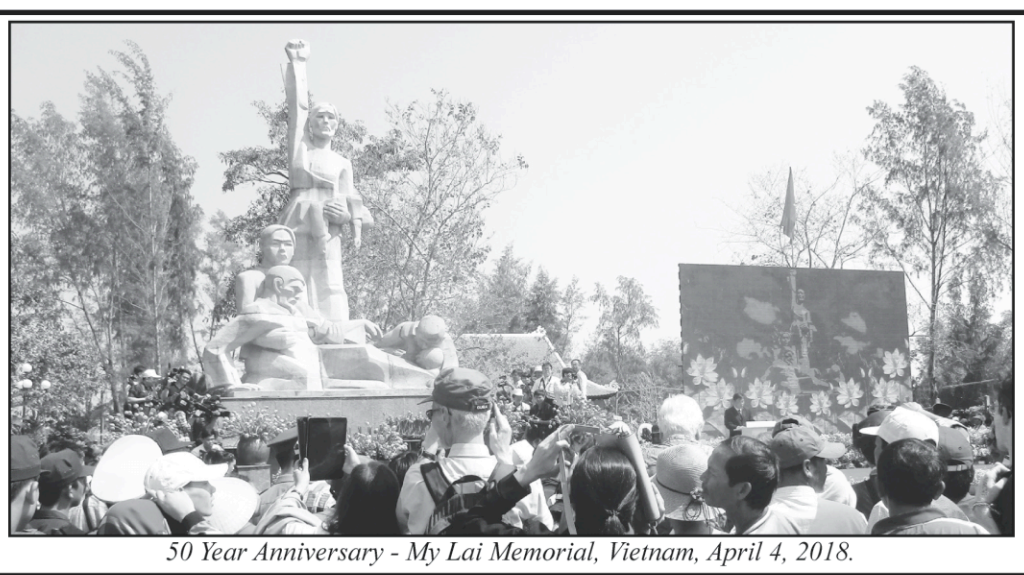
It was like many of us died mentally in Vietnam. And that was a real death for us because it was accepted by the subconscious mind. Also many of us, and in particular those with PTSD, also acquired what I have learned to call the "Ponce de Leon Syndrome" (PDL) which suggests an age arrest also described many of us. Part of us died and life was what happened before the death and being in Vietnam. That is the reason, I believe, why many veterans, often, do not seem to have grown up and like to party like they were 18 years old or younger. The average age in Vietnam was 19. The only life we knew before Vietnam.

Psychotherapeutic methods of dealing with these coping mechanisms I found and share with others who practice Medical Hypnoanalysis. Such practitioners may be found where you are located and can be found at the American Academy of Medical Hypnoanalysts website at www.aamh.com.

I had sought out counseling while in Vietnam and saw a Navy psychiatrist. I complained that we were killing our own troops as the ammunition for our mortars were made in World War II. The increments that propelled the rounds had broken down. There were times I could see the rounds come out of the tubes. All the Vietnamese I was seeing could not have a clue about communism or capitalism. They were just trying to survive. The doctor labeled me a "perfectionist." This taught me a lot about our military health care systems.

Another aspect I personally include, when warranted, is the ramifications of betrayal that our country has left on many of us, which is left out of many practitioners in and out of the VA.

Bill Ronan, LICSW, is a Medical Hypnoanalyst and Certified PTSD Clinician in Minnesota. Bill also specializes in CBT & Mindfulness. He is the author of Psychological Autopsy: Elvis Presley. Bill can be reached at www.MNHypnosis.com.



50 Year Anniversary - My Lai Memorial, Vietnam, April 4, 2018.

All the Difference

Peter Stine (reviewer)

All the Difference by Daniel Lavery *(CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2013)*

I finished *All the Difference*, and what a fine memoir it is! I found it totally engrossing. The opening swept me in. I can imagine the pain his mother felt, he felt, and then the contrasting personality of his father, that swimming lesson he gave Dan, wow. It is so rich in episode, and in particular, the chapter describing Dan shooting the crabs and beautiful bird, his remorse, and Ruthie's gentle instruction in the holiness of all creatures, even the Golden Garden Spider, struck me. Or his discovery of the sanctity of nature's beauty on his travels, or of baseball. The writing is lucid and concrete and engaging, he is on his way. Dan's story that begins in a military family split by divorce and ends with him emerging as a brilliant ACLU lawyer in California is quite remarkable and riveted me for days.

The section on Yokohama I loved and Eddie is a great glimpse of raw American energy. Dan's portraits of scrappy uneducated types are consistently strong. His account of cultural awakening is very well done, a great chapter, especially his discovery that the Japanese were individual beings physically and mentally, that our racist stereotype of them was nothing more. Strong descriptions of nature in trips with Alex. His sexual initiation in Yokosuka is cool. I liked the sports here, and Tom's converting him to fundamentalist Christianity. Good on his religious inquiries and the skepticism offered by Jerry's dad, since the memoir is a long tale of deconversion, overthrowing indoctrination. His brush with death in the train tunnel was excruciatingly real.

The civil rights history delivered by the professor on the Sunset Limited is a bit undigested in the narrative, but probably necessary to educate the reader to the world they will be entering. I admired Dan's gutsy, principled withdrawal from NROTC at Duke, again a dramatic self-definition. Good on learning the brutality of the Old Testament God; it brought to mind Stephen Pinker's *Better Angels of our Nature*. A great account of his religious bible classes and new agnosticism. That freshman Dean of Students calling Dan a low IQ case is amazing. Dan's evolving shift from Duke to the Naval Academy is traced in subtle detail, and his account of that Plebe year fascinated and shocked me. Standing up to the two bullying upperclassmen over civil rights and then the great portrait of Joe Duff is superb. Dan is at his best when, against the odds, he courageously stands up to arrogant and abusive authority figures, whether Duff, the Folsom prison molester, or the landlord threatening his tenant – these moments sparkle, the portrait of malice is stark, and his own moral principles manifest.

It is harrowing to read of his experience as an aviator on an AR5C, and I remember Dan telling me about the lethal risks involved in the late 1960s. It was fun to read about his time at Berkeley then, Jerry, his well-described acid trip, Delaware Street, etc. The conclusion of the memoir about Dan's amazing legal work for the UFW, ACLU, his alliance with Jerry, life with Joan, all of it was interesting, totally engrossing. Finally, I noticed throughout the last third of the memoir Dan labeled the Vietnam War as genocidal, which is exactly right. Thanks for the opportunity to read this terrific book.

Dr. Peter Stine, Ph.D., U.C. Berkeley, is a professor of English at South Carolina State U., Wayne State U., and U. of Michigan.

On Tyranny

Steve Geiger (reviewer)

On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century by Timothy Snyder
(Tim Duggan Books, 2017)

"In politics, being deceived is no excuse." – Leszek Kolakowski

Timothy Snyder is the Levin Professor of History at Yale University. He has written previously on the topics of: *Nationalism, Marxism and Modern Central Europe*, *Wall Around the West: State Borders and Immigration Controls in the United States and Europe*, *The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Belarus 1569-1999*, and *Politics in Life and Death* (in Czech). He has written about the holocaust, Stalin and Europe, Ukrainian history, and the *Balkans as Europe*.

Do not be intimidated by these titles. *On Tyranny* is exceptionally readable, it is not a history so much as an imperative for anyone interested in our flawed democracy. It is a primer on the ability authoritarianism has demonstrated for replacing democracy in ancient and modern times. It is comprised of 20 short chapters, each being instructional and imperative with Chapter 1 entitled, "Do Not Obey in Advance." He then provides examples of how in 1932, Jews naively cooperated with the Fascists hoping that their conformity to the new authority would aid their tribe. He calls it anticipatory obedience. History proved them wrong.

This book is small, measuring 4-1/4" x 6-1/4", 126 pages long, but do we really need a long discussion on this topic as it relates to the current political climate? It would seem that Professor Snyder chose this format because he felt the urgency of the subject and wanted a sound, simple, but dire warning and felt the need to get it in print in 2017.

I quote a sample here from the Prologue to the book in the hope that you will get a copy published by Tim Duggan Books under Penguin Random House.

"History does not repeat, but it does instruct. As the Founding Fathers debated the Constitution, they took instruction from the history they knew. Concerned that the democratic republic they envisioned would collapse, they contemplated the descent of ancient democracies and republics into oligarchy and empire. As they knew Aristotle warned that inequality brought instability while Plato believed that demagogues exploited free speech to install themselves as tyrants. In founding a democratic republic upon law and establishing a system of checks and balances, the Founding Fathers sought to avoid the evil that they . . . called tyranny. . . . The good news is that we can draw upon more recent relevant examples than ancient Greece and Rome. The bad news is that the history of modern democracy is also one of decline and fall. Since the American colonies declared their independence from a British monarchy that the Founding Fathers deemed 'tyrannical,' European history has seen three major democratic moments: after the First World War in 1918, after the second World War in 1945, and after the end of communism in 1989. Many of the democracies founded at these junctures failed, in circumstances that in some important respects resemble our own."

That's about as dense as it gets.

People dislike history because they see it as dry, distant events, divorced from their reality. This tiny book is full of relatable examples of how our democratic institutions are being destroyed before our very eyes. You can read it in three or four hours, but you might take longer as you will be inclined to re-read paragraphs as you realize how the impossible horror is possible. You get the democracy you deserve. If we don't change Congress in 2018, we have only ourselves to blame.

Steve Geiger was a Captain in the USAF and flew 225 missions from U-Tapao, Thailand and Anderson, Guam.

Coping with PTSD

John Ketwig

I strongly suggest you go to www.LarryShook.com. Larry is a former Vietnam door gunner, a former journalist, and a Washington state PTSD sufferer. *YouTube* has a video of Larry delivering a speech called, if I remember correctly, "Grace and Me: A Forbidden Tale of War," about his struggles with PTSD that is one of the most moving and articulate discussions of the subject I have ever seen. Today, you will find a number of articles on the topic "The Rape of Mary Kay." Larry has become an advocate for this poor lady veteran.

Mary Kay McCollum was a Navy nurse with an outstanding record. She was raped and drugged by a Navy superior and threatened with murder if she reported him. Her job performance suffered, as a result, effectively ending her career. The officer was court-martialed and found guilty, but Mary Kay's claims to the VA for PTSD benefits have been studiously denied for 14 years! Larry Shook is trying to make her case known, and I hope this small article in *The Veteran* will add to the momentum that will finally allow this poor lady to receive the benefits she deserves. This case is a terrible example of what veterans are up against when dealing with the Pentagon and the VA. I believe many cases are judged by the effects an acknowledgment by the VA might have on the image of the military, and especially its efforts to entice new recruits. I urge you to become familiar with Mary Kay's situation, and then write letters and raise a little hell on her behalf. #TimesUp!

John Ketwig is a lifetime member of VVAW, and the author of "...and a hard rain fell: A G.I.'s True Story of the War in Vietnam."

New York VVAW at the 2018 St. Pat's Day Parade.

Casualty Poem

At dusk, what hand dropped the metal bulb
Down the narrow tube, lifting it skyward?
I was dreaming the moment the plummeting
Brightness struck, a dim noise, I was lifted
Floating above myself, below
The soft fiery puffs of mortar shells
The firefly tracer paths
The glow of skittering shrapnel
Then all at once
When I crashed down
This lifting gift upended.
In my absence, only my beating
Heart, everything breathing.
Turning about, I woke to help them
But stumbled, fell
The back of my head, my chest, too wet
Too warm for comfort. Someone
Held my arms, legs, pressed white cloth
Dim voices, "…not gonna make it."
Then waiting in the green trembling thing
Doctors and more blood, this time good.
A year of red dust, red rain.
Years to unlearn it.
Of late, in the hills where I live,
When the moon is low
The frozen sky flecked by starlight
In those still moments, by that hand
My darkness disarmed, I am uplifted.

—Marc Levy

W A R

Wealthy
Are
Richer

The banality of evil keeps dribbling
the ball down court.
The Dow Jones keeps scoring.
The black limousine pulls up
to the funeral home.
The body is transported to the
church on time.
Everything has to do with timing.
The Brink's Armored truck pulls
up to the White House for its
portion of the profit.
Synchronicity to perfection.
The flags are at half mast.
Taps... always Taps.
In God We Trust.

Jesus Christ !!
The death of a belief system.
The sleeping are buried alive in
cemeteries all across the nation.
Make America Great Again...

—Mike Hastie

William Joiner Institute Under Siege

Marc Levy

EXTRA!!! David vs Goliath!!!

In 1995, when reading my paperback copy of *The Sorrow of War*, by the North Vietnamese veteran and novelist Bao Ninh, I would fall into a trance, feel as if I were floating above my bed. What was happening, I did not know. Several months later, traveling in Southeast Asia, I invented excuses to not locate Ninh.

A year later, in New York, I purchased the book in hardback. At the sight of Ninh's dust jacket photo, I saw again the faces of soldiers my platoon had hunted, and who'd hunted us. That night I dreamt my platoon was trapped, out of ammo, trying desperately to escape.

In the winter of 1998, I mailed a hard copy letter to Bao Ninh. Two months later I received his reply: "On the occasion of Christmas and the New Year, I am very glad to send you our warmest regard from Vietnam. I wish you and your family a new year full of happiness. I hope we will soon meet each other in Hanoi."

In 2000, I decided to attend the annual William Joiner Institute Writer's Workshop, located at UMass Boston. On the first day, while seated in a packed auditorium, forty meters to my right, I noticed five Vietnamese men waiting to be introduced to the audience. With their remarks concluded, single file, they headed back to the exit at the rear of the room. Instantly I jumped up and pushed past a gauntlet of outstretched legs.

"Excuse me…excuse me…" I said, following my target.

"Bao Ninh!" I stammered as he neared the door.

He turned around. The puzzled look on his face said, "Who has called me? Which of the American's knows my name?"

From five meters we locked eyes.

"Moc Leby! Moc Leby," he shouted when I told him my name.

We rushed to each other's open arms. Ninh pulled me close, clapped my back once, twice three times, as if I were a long-lost friend. Overcome by deep feelings, I sobbed uncontrollably. Ninh took my hand, led me away.

"No…I'm all right," I said, still sobbing.

A tall graceful woman drew near. Later, I learned that during the war, Lady Borton had provided medical aid to both sides. A noted translator and writer, she had accompanied the Vietnamese delegation from Hanoi. Through her, Ninh and I spoke excitedly. Then Ninh said he had to leave. We could meet tomorrow at noon.

"Yes…thank you," I managed to say.

The next day, under a grove of trees overlooking Boston Harbor, we spoke for three hours.

That night, a recurring nightmare: the invisible spirit grabs my feet. Yanks them straight up. I can't move. I scream and struggle. Waking, I'm overcome with dread. But this time, this night, I fight back. Defeat the demon. This time, waking, I'm calm, free, nearly euphoric.

Over the years I've attended half a dozen Joiner Institute Writer's Workshops. This is where I learned to write. With other vets and civilians, I've studied with novelists Tim O'Brien and Larry Heinemann, with distinguished poets Bruce Weigl, Fred Marchant, and Martha Collins. The latter four are my friends, and I have benefitted from their friendship and writing expertise, as have many Joiner Institute writer's workshop participants. Meeting Bao Ninh was pure chance. It might not have happened without the Joiner Institute.

Writers and activist folk who have appeared at Joiner workshops or forums include: Oliver Stone, Carolyn Forche, Brian Turner, Aafa Michael Weaver, Maxine Hong Kingston, Lloyd Schwartz, Yusef Komunyakaa, Daisy Zamora, George Evans, Gloria Emerson, Nguyen Ba Chung, Grace Paley, Wayne Karlin, Paul Atwood, Martin Espada, Bill Ehrhart, Macdara Woods, Demetria Martinez, Andrew Bacevich, and Sam Hamill. To name a few.

Throughout the year, for over thirty years, the Joiner Institute promotes research, curriculum development, events, and educational, cultural, and humanitarian exchanges which address the consequences of war. By serving veterans, family members of veterans, war refugees and all victims of war, Joiner aims to create a public space where the issues of war and their human, social, political, and environmental consequences can be openly discussed, debated, and analyzed.

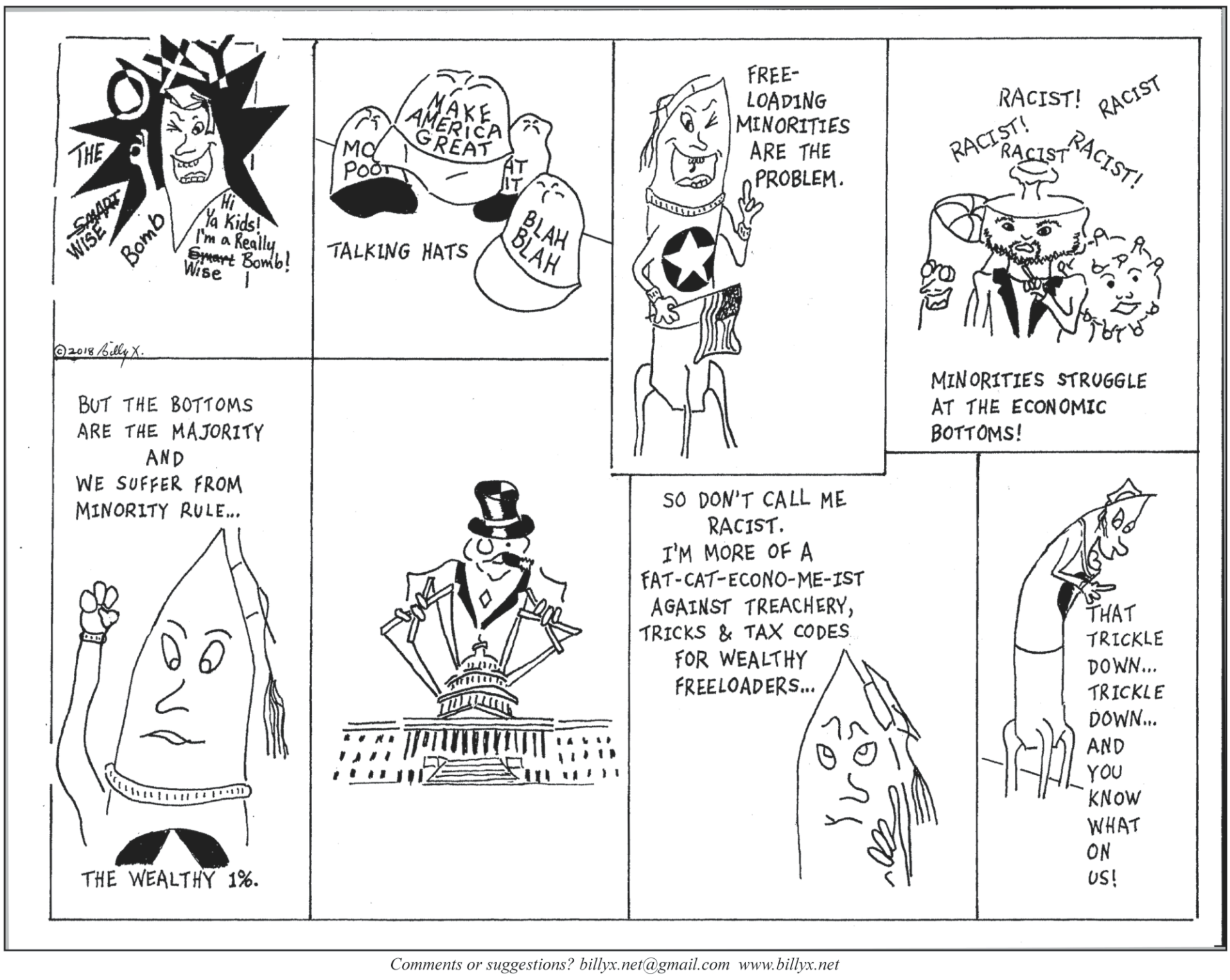
But all this may soon change. To increase its revenue, UMass Boston top brass, applying a business model which values profits over people, has slashed Joiner's budget to the bone. Joiner may not survive. This is textbook David versus Goliath: Joiner is an irreplaceable gem.

UMass Boston, in its hard-headed mercantile wisdom, hopes to squash Joiner bug-like for the sake of cold hard cash. I ask you: Is shutting out voices that witness for peace the way to run a university?

Following the devastating news, Joiner staff morale plummeted. Then rallied. With former and current Joiner directors Kevin Bowen and Tom Kane leading the way, the response has been swift. An online petition. Outreach to persons of prominence. But more voices are needed to compel UMass Boston to fully restore Joiner's funding.

The Joiner Institute needs your help. Sign the petition at Change.org. Donate funds. Because sometimes you have to kick ass and take names to give peace a chance.

Marc Levy was an infantry medic with the First Cavalry Division in Vietnam and Cambodia in 1970. He won the 2016 Syracuse University Institute for Veterans and Military Families Writing Prize. His books include How Stevie Nearly Lost the War and Other Postwar Stories, and Dreams, Vietnam. His website is Medic in the Green Time.com.



Comments or suggestions? billyx.net@gmail.com www.billyx.net

THE VETERAN

SECTION D

Volume 48, Number 1 Spring 2018

A True Spat-Upon Soldier Story

W. D. Ehrhart

Back in the fall of 2017, a lot of Americans watched the long-awaited *The Vietnam War* documentary by Ken Burns and Lynn Novick. It is powerful and moving, disturbing, enlightening, and challenging.

But it is not without its omissions and distortions. One of them involves how returning soldiers were and were not treated. On multiple occasions throughout the series, both veterans and non-veterans state that returning soldiers were frequently accosted by anti-war demonstrators, called "baby killer," and otherwise abused.

That does not accord with my own experiences. I returned to the US from Asia twice in full military uniform, March 1968 and June 1969, both times passing through San Francisco airport—the heart of hippiedom—on my way home to Philadelphia. No one ever accosted me.

In May 1970, after the killings at Kent State, I joined the anti-war movement, but I did not spit on myself or call myself "baby killer." Moreover, I never saw anyone else around me abusing soldiers or veterans.

Vietnam War veteran Jerry Lembcke reinforces my anecdotal evidence in his book *The Spitting Image: Myth, Memory, and the Legacy of Vietnam* (NYU Press, 2000), which thoroughly investigates these stories of abuse.

I, however, do have a true "spat-upon veteran story." It goes like this:

The day after I came home from Vietnam in early March 1968, I took the money I'd saved in those 13 months and went to West German Motors in Ft. Washington, PA, and bought a brand new Volkswagen. VW Beetle. Red with black interior.

Only I didn't buy it. I had to give the money to my father, and he bought it because I was not legally old enough to buy a car. The owner's card remained in my father's name for the next year and a half until I turned 21, which was the age of majority then in Pennsylvania.

The day after that, I went to McKeever Insurance, in my hometown of Perkasie, PA, to get insurance for my car. But Mrs. McKeever told me I couldn't get a policy in my name. I would have to be carried on my parents' policy as a dependent child.

Understand what I'm saying here: I had just spent 13 months fighting in Vietnam. I was a combat-wounded Marine Corps sergeant, but the state of Pennsylvania recognized me only as a child dependent on my parents.

Let me say that again: I had just spent 13 months fighting in Vietnam. I was a combat-wounded Marine Corps sergeant, but the state of Pennsylvania recognized me only as a dependent child.

Indeed, I could not even legally buy a beer in my own hometown.

And when I began college in the fall of 1969, unlike the World War II and Korean War veterans who received full college tuition plus monthly living expenses in recognition of their service, I got $135 a month for every month I spent in the Marines, which was hardly enough to buy my books and cover the cost of my dorm room; it didn't even begin to cover my tuition.

You want to talk about abuse and disrespect? I was indeed abused and disrespected when I came home from the Vietnam War, but it wasn't the anti-war people who were abusing and disrespecting me.

Bill Ehrhart, a Marine Corps veteran of the American War in Vietnam, is a life member of VVAW, a major interviewee in The Vietnam War, and author of numerous books including Vietnam-Perkasie: A Combat Marine Memoir.

Vietnam Ambush

John Ketwig (reviewer)

Vietnam Ambush by Daniel Seidenberg, Jr.
(Publish America, 2010)

Daniel Seidenberg, Jr. was a California teenager, recently graduated from high school. He spent the summer of 1967 on the beach surfing, and then his draft notice arrived. To avoid the draft, he enlisted. He doesn't detail this arrangement, but it seems that he signed up for only two years and was assigned to the infantry. "I figured I could serve my country for two years and then carry on with a normal, civilian life," he writes. "Six months later I was in combat in Vietnam." *Vietnam Ambush* is a thin but very powerful book, a spare and unadorned but very thought-provoking description of his experiences as a grunt in Vietnam. Perhaps it is because the emotions Seidenberg describes are so familiar that this book is so devastatingly effective. Assigned to the 199th Infantry Brigade, the author describes the overwhelming fear and exhaustion he felt as his unit was assigned to a variety of missions and locations, all of which required lots of walking, carrying a heavy load of equipment in the terribly inhospitable conditions of Vietnam.

There is little that's new in this book, but the reader feels the draining fatigue, the electric terror, and the horrors that are so prevalent in modern warfare. The youthful surfer had to adjust to life in a war zone if he would survive, and the reader feels every ache and pain as Dan Seidenberg trudges through the harsh physical and emotional challenges of Vietnam. He must adapt to raw terror and the sight of human bodies destroyed, and the devastating loss of friends. Seidenberg understands that his story threatens to wear down a reader, especially one who has not experienced war, and he deftly interjects brief moments of humor, the youthful interactions with his comrades that allow them all to struggle through and maintain some sanity in a crazy, deadly environment. The reader is refreshed at these moments, but the story is anything but fun. Ultimately, Dan Seidenberg was hit by shrapnel in the right temple, a wound that left him totally disabled and unable to return to that normal, civilian life. His return home was every bit as difficult as his combat tour.

Vietnam Ambush is a relentless little book, and the author comes across as a great guy caught up in a war on the other side of the planet. The war disrupted every aspect of his life, the Veterans Administration was reluctant to help him, and yet he persevered and succeeded. Okay, it's not a unique story, but it is very well told and believable, and it should serve as a warning to young people considering joining the military. I came away wishing Dan Seidenberg, Jr. lived nearby because he seems to be a great guy and an excellent writer. I bet we could sit down with a couple beers and have a terrific conversation. *Vietnam Ambush* is not a book that will attract a lot of attention, but it is certainly an excellent telling of one man's devastating war experience. It's available on Amazon for under twenty dollars, and you won't be disappointed.

John Ketwig is the author of ... and a hard rain fell: A G.I.'s True Story of the War in Vietnam which remains in print after 32 years and 27 printings (Macmillan, 1985). A new book, Vietnam Reconsidered: The War, the Times, and Why They Matter is slated for publication early in 2019. John is a lifetime member of Vietnam Veterans Against the War.

The Road Not Taken

John Ketwig (reviewer)

The Road Not Taken: Edward Lansdale and the American Tragedy in Vietnam by Max Boot
(Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2018)

Every once in a while, a book comes along that just dares me to read it, and this is one of those books. My fascination started when I found a half dozen hard-covers on the "military history" shelf at the local Barnes & Noble. Then the author appeared on one of those evening news commentary shows on *MSNBC* or *CNN*, and finally when he appeared on Book TV from a California festival, interviewed by General David Petraeus. Based up that TV interview, it seems that Max Boot and General Petraeus are great admirers of each other. General Petraeus has offered a most enthusiastic endorsement at the very top of the rear cover, suggesting that the story of Edward Lansdale's career, with landmark activities in the Philippines and Vietnam, "offers important lessons for the present day."

The Road Not Taken is almost surely destined to be another best-seller for author Max Boot. In his prologue, the author suggests that "the worst military defeat in American history might have taken a very different course… if the counsel of this CIA operative and Air Force officer had been followed." He describes Lansdale as a singular visionary, an unhonored strategist, a sidelined advisor who wanted to follow Robert Frost's "the road not taken." I was very familiar with the name Lansdale. Other books have described his influence in Vietnam, and in Washington, in somewhat less enthusiastic tones, and author Boot repeatedly reminds the reader that Lansdale's methods were at best unconventional. He was a charismatic fellow, able to engage the high and mighty in conversations, and to offer advice that this book tries to convince us was hugely effective. But to what effect? He may have become a close personal friend of South Vietnam's tyrannical President Diem, but his input certainly didn't alter Diem's cruel and dictatorial ways. The author's telling of the story comes across as almost hero worship, and there is precious little discussion of Diem's atrocities that inspired the Vietnamese to struggle so desperately for independence and freedom. There is even less mention of the American bombing or the use of chemicals such as napalm and the Agent Orange family of defoliants that were used to poison people, crops, and water supplies. There is virtually no discussion of the corruption that undermined both the Vietnamese and American efforts and no mention at all of the CIA's involvement in the Southeast Asian drug trade. And there is no mention of the millions of low-ranking GIs who were caught up in this international feeding frenzy. Throughout *The Road Not Taken*, Boot avoids any description of the dark side of covert activities. The Strategic Hamlet program supposedly blunted the efforts of the Viet Cong to infiltrate villages, never suggesting that the forcible removal of Vietnamese peasants from their ancestral homes inspired many to join the Viet Cong cause. I don't recall ever seeing the word "terrorism" occur throughout the book's hefty 717 pages, and it was surely never used to describe the activities of the CIA spooks in Vietnam.

Author Boot is a Senior Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, a non-government think tank, and it appears he is considered a mover and shaker in the creation of "prescriptions" for our country's foreign policy. One look at the front page of a newspaper will tell you how that has worked out.

For an esteemed foreign policy advisor, Mr. Boot sometimes gets a little careless with his facts. In his Introduction, page xlv, he writes that in the twenty-first century, "democracy has spread across Asia to such disparate lands as Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Burma, and Nepal." Really? In Burma, the official government position is that 1.3 million Rohingya Muslims do not even exist, and the word Rohingya is not allowed to be used, even by foreigners, while a program of extreme ethnic cleansing is underway. Boot discusses the Dulles brothers, Allen and John Foster, in glowing terms. During World War II, Boot says "German officials dissatisfied with the Nazis were showing up in the sitting room of his cozy apartment," neglecting to mention that Dulles specialized in laundering the Nazis' money, fencing their stolen artwork and goods worldwide, and after the war, helping many of them to escape capture and trial. In fact, Allen Dulles lobbied to have a number of former Nazi officials placed in positions of authority after the war, arguing that they had "experience" in government. The Dulles brothers detested Communism, and they were among the originators of the Cold War.

Edward Lansdale was a gifted man, an adventurer, but also a CIA spook in Vietnam at the end of the French colonial period and the early days of the American intervention. *The Road Not Taken* acknowledges the American tragedy of Vietnam in its subtitle, but the author's concept of "tragedy" seems to be that a vast array of military and intelligence leaders did not give Ed Lansdale his due. In the overall debate over strategies and tactics, his opinions were often ignored. The author fails to see that Lansdale, like about 4.5 million of the rest of us, was used by the powers to further their genocidal campaign for power and riches. The real tragedy of America's war in Vietnam is that this head-in-the-sand telling of history is so prevalent today. The government's 50th Anniversary Commemoration of the war, the seriously flawed Ken Burns series on *PBS TV*, and now *The Road Not Taken* are all part of a package that has been gift-wrapped, tied with a pretty bow, and presented to the American people in an attempt to convince us that the Vietnam War was a noble and necessary event. I guess these things just come in threes.

It is curious that this book came to my attention as I was reading Frank Nelson's *Blind Nation* (*reviewed on page 28*). Certainly, *The Road Not Taken* will be a big success. It is an entertaining read and would be convincing to folks who have not seen Edward Lansdale mentioned in other books. Students and others who wonder what really happened in the early days of the Vietnam War would be better served if they read *Blind Nation*.

John Ketwig is the author of … and a hard rain fell: A G.I.'s True Story of the War in Vietnam which remains in print after 32 years and 27 printings (Macmillan, 1985). A new book, Vietnam Reconsidered: The War, the Times, and Why They Matter is slated for publication early in 2019. John is a lifetime member of Vietnam Veterans Against the War.

Tin Can

Dan Lavery (reviewer)

Tin Can by Allen Leonard Meese
(CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2017)

Tin Can is a new book on an old subject with an urgent and creative voice demanding and deserving attention. Written as a fictitious novel, the subject matter builds into a crescendo of action into a mutiny by thirteen determined sailors on an American destroyer. Meese knows his subject well and speaks with authority on all naval matters having had three years on a destroyer, affectionately called a Tin Can, probably because it bobs up and down in a rough ocean much like a can despite its weight, speed, and accuracy at gunnery operations. Meese describes his awakening to the reasons so many protested this unpopular immoral war including, "pride, profit, and big shots on power trips. So noble." Meanwhile, although President Johnson had admitted, "We can't win it and we can't get out of it," Meese describes this war as being "clamped in a grand mal seizure of bloodlust" when a simple solution was to declare peace and end it. But no, Johnson pressed it until 58,000 American and a few million local civilians had died meaninglessly and unnecessarily.

From the beginning, Meese points out Article 94 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice on Mutiny or Sedition is punishable by death as well as desertion under Article 85. Meese opines that the "poor enlisted man who hates the crimes which he is ordered to commit is forced to mutiny or to die a little within himself." The first couple of chapters introduce the reader to rituals at sea, the routines on a destroyer, gunnery drills, the details of his destroyer, and then eventually ordered shooting into jungle areas inhabited by Vietnamese obviously killing anyone who is the victim of such bombardment. Liberty in port usually meant a quick short time with a whore for the best price and all the beer or whiskey one could find. Friendships and loyalties developed to combat the incessant message that sailors were meaningless while "lifers" mattered. He decried that he would have been an officer had he not failed his eye exam for Annapolis in 1964.

Active duty sailor reading the Winter Soldier, predecessor of The Veteran.

Mutiny in Vietnam has been a subject of historian interest as the University of Massachusetts' Professor Christian G. Appy described with the help of an army of grad students' research in his treatise, *American Reckoning, The Vietnam War And Our National Identity*. He reported anti-war protests that included four anti-war sailors from the aircraft carrier Intrepid in October 1967 who deserted to Japan after a bombing mission in the Gulf of Tonkin and who worked the catapult to launch countless navy jet bombers on Vietnam missions. Appy reports Col. Robert Heinl (ret.) said: "Our army that remains in Vietnam is in a state approaching collapse, with individual units avoiding or having refused combat, murdering their officers, and non-commissioned officers, drug-ridden and dispirited where not near mutinous." Five aircraft carriers were kept out of the combat zone by acts of sabotage and protest by active duty sailors and some anti-war pilots who were refusing to fly combat missions.

Meese used the Gulf of Tonkin for the beginning scene of his mutiny after a few chapters that discuss tedious but necessary naval procedures aboard a destroyer and the role of subservient sailors in a Navy filled with bombastic traditions in our most unpopular war. Eventually, another sailor Obie, reveals his commonly held anti-Vietnam war views, at least among Jack's friends, to the brass. They send him to the brig where he is beaten unmercifully, then tortured, and dies! This caused his crew members, like Jack who hung with other anti-Vietnam War sailors, to pledge retaliation. John "Jack" Mason, raises the stakes much higher leading a mutiny with his 13 comrades. That left more than 100 men, including, of course, the "lifers" like the Captain, Chief Petty Officers who had spent more than ten years in their "profession," locked physically out of interference with the 12 instigators by a quick show of weapons and force. I must leave the details of this exciting mutiny for the reader to discover and ruminate over. So much happens so fast, and at such potential cost to one's future, it is an amazing task Meese does well in scrambling together from his imagination based on the details he knew and amassed from his research. You will not regret discovering how these 12 men managed to take their destroyer with many naval hostages five hours up a river to China where this writer leaves you to imagine what happens next or find out by reading this action-packed adventure with the most severe of all possibilities with which the mutineers contend.

Dan Lavery graduated Annapolis, navigated a Navy jet, was carrier qualified, and earned NAO wings in Florida, and then a ship to Vietnam. He resigned, turned peace activist, joined VVAW, and became a civil rights lawyer. His memoir, All the Difference, describes his change from a pawn in the military to a crusader for justice. www.danielclavery.com

Establishment Account of the Vietnam War

Roger Carasso

After having watched all 18 hours of the Ken Burns and Lynn Novick documentary, *The Vietnam War*, it is apparent that those who rule us, and therefore the great majority of the public, are not ready for the truth about the nature of the Vietnam War. Neither are Ken Burns and Lynn Novick in their documentary, which was partially sponsored by David H. Koch. That says a lot.

In the first episode, the narrator tells us that the war was "begun in good faith [sic!] by decent [sic!] people out of fatal misunderstandings [!]"

Generally speaking, has anyone heard of a dominant imperial or hegemonic power, like the US, winning its empire by relying on "decent people" of "good faith?" That would apply neither to the Roman empire, the British empire, the French empire, etc., nor ours. Hegemonies are built by aggression, conquest, and dishonesty.

Just how "decent" and "well-meaning" was President Eisenhower when he overthrew the democratic Iranian regime of Mohammad Mossadegh (1953), the democratic Guatemalan regime of Jacobo Arbenz (1954), and together with the Belgians, orchestrated the assassination of populist Congo leader, Patrice Lumumba (1960)? He then "decently" involved the US in establishing and propping up a corrupt puppet or quisling regime in South Vietnam.

It's not that the documentary is without merit. To its credit, it gives a hearing to the Vietnamese/communist side. It shows that war protesters can be patriotic. It condemns French colonialism and stresses the corruption of the puppet governments we supported. It gives good coverage of our My Lai massacres and rapes. It exposes Nixon sabotaging the peace efforts of President Johnson so that the Democrats would lose the election. Just the same, it misses the big picture of what our aggression in Vietnam meant.

1. We largely financed the French colonialists and we didn't want them to stop the war or participate in the 1954 Geneva Accords, which ended the war. French foreign minister, Georges Bidault, stated that Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, took him aside, and asked him, "What if we gave you two atomic bombs?" "Not one, two," stressed Bidault (you can see this for yourself in the best documentary I've seen on Vietnam, Peter Davis' *Hearts and Minds*. It was not mentioned by the Burns/Novick documentary).

2. The 1954 Geneva Accords which ended the French-Indochinese war stipulated, among other things, that Vietnam would be temporarily divided, but both Vietnams were forbidden to join either the Soviet or American side. We immediately created SEATO (Southeast Asia Treaty Organization) which extended its umbrella to South Vietnam, in gross violation of the 1954 agreements. This is not even mentioned in the documentary.

3. We also violated the agreements' stipulation that both Vietnams were to be united in 1956 through free elections. The documentary mentions this but omits mention of how we deliberately sabotaged the elections because we knew the Communists, led by hugely popular Ho Chi Minh (who is given sympathetic treatment by the documentary) would win by a landslide, which Eisenhower later admitted.

4. Mentions uncritically the "domino" theory which was one rationalization for our intervention, lest Vietnam become the first falling domino. In fact, whatever foreign power controlled Vietnam in the past 150 years was in a mess. France conquered Indochina in the 1880s when France was in decline; it had been defeated by Germany in the Franco-Prussian War of 1871. Japan took direct control of Vietnam when it was on the ropes. The "domino" theory didn't work too well for either of them.

5. When we compelled the partition of Vietnam, we tried to have all the North Vietnamese Catholics flee to South Vietnam. Under the leadership of Colonel Edward Lansdale, the CIA started a mass propaganda campaign to terrify Catholics into leaving North Vietnam, warning of persecution, rapes, murders, anything to frighten them into leaving, which half of them did - not mentioned by the documentary.

6. Our soldiers are again and again depicted as valiant, dedicated, heroic, trying to "save" Vietnam. "How does America produce young men like this?" proudly exclaims a former veteran.

7. It mentioned Martin Luther King finally condemning the war in 1967, but carefully omits his most telling words about the US being "the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today." That wouldn't mesh with "good faith" or "decent people."

8. It vastly underplays the CIA-led "Phoenix Program" (1965?-1972), a terrorist program meant to gather intelligence through starvation, murder, rape, corruption, and torture. One example: putting a 6-inch dowel into the canal of a detainee's ears, and tapping it through the brain until he died. Phoenix operatives neutralized over 80,000 suspected National Liberation Front members, or falsely and profitably accused members.

9. It mentions commanding general William Westmoreland, but omits his smug, arrogant comment that "Life is cheap in the Orient." It's not the "Orientals" who killed millions of Indo-Chinese victims. He represents a sort of crass ethnocentrism which certainly did not help win over the "hearts and minds" of the Vietnamese.

10. It continues the old Cold War canard of frightening Soviet expansion, whereas it was the US which, in fact, was expanding its influence globally.

11. It lauded the courage and dedication of the ARVN (our puppet troops), yet one of their interviewees conceded that "we all knew the ARVN couldn't face" the Vietnamese. Towards the end of the war, some 20,000 puppet soldiers were deserting monthly.

12. It quotes a couple or more times John Negroponte, presented as a life-long career diplomat/expert. However, it doesn't mention that Negroponte (ambassador to Honduras, 1981-85) was a sponsor of death squads in Central America whom he supported and financed, and involved in the Phoenix program.

13. It mentions how Presidents Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon viewed the war through the prisms of not losing the next election. An example of "decent, well-meaning" men??

14. It sentimentally glorifies the Vietnam Wall, and therefore, the war.

15. It concludes that the war was a "tragedy." The killing of millions of Vietnamese, Laotians, and Cambodians is more than a tragedy. It is a horrible crime of aggression against small countries posing no threat whatsoever to our country.

That is the greatest weakness of the documentary. It nowhere suggests how our aggression against Vietnam fits into our long history of imperial aggression and domination. This failure accounts for President George H. W. Bush boasting, after the Gulf War, "By God, we've kicked the Vietnam syndrome once and for all" (1991), that is, we can feel ever freer about committing aggression. We have often scolded the Japanese for not admitting more frankly to their World War II (and before) crimes. They could easily have cited our example of dishonesty about the Vietnam War. It's unlikely we'll ever be honest about this shameful war until we change the nature of our society.

Roger Carasso served in the army (1954-56), then got his PhD from Princeton University. He has taught at the University of Wisconsin, Northern Illinois University, Purdue University, and California State University, Northridge (CSUN). His special interest is classical political theory.

Fatigues For Freedom Fighters, Milwaukee, 1978.

Long Daze at Long Binh

John Zutz (reviewer)

Long Daze at Long Binh by Steve Donovan and Fred Borchardt
(DCI Communications, 2017)

I was originally attracted to this book because the two authors are from Wisconsin, and it is billed as being funny. Now, we all had funny experiences, but I figured a funny book about our war in Vietnam would take some writing skill, and I was right.

The format is a bit unusual. It's as if they are having a conversation at the bar of the VFW. They take turns talking, and take turns being the straight guy.

The first hundred pages describe boot camp, advanced medic training, and riding a ship to Vietnam. They do a fair job of skewering our leaders in Vietnam. They are surprised to be in a war zone with their weapons kept under lock and key. When one of their cohorts writes his Congressman, who questions the practice, they are issued weapons, but the ammo is still locked in a bunker.

They mock their orders on guard duty, no shooting unless fired upon, and then to only shoot to wound. They list a series of mishaps and snafus that sound familiar, and similar to experiences I've had.

We all experienced humorous episodes in our military journey (at least they seem funny now, when looking back), and Donovan and Borchardt seem to be about average in that account. They realize they were lucky to be hospital corpsmen rather than infantry medics. They document the REMF experience.

The narrative illustrates how the two men, through different motives and intentions, can see two different wars even though they were side by side through their service.

Vietnam vets probably won't find much new or illuminating here. I think the authors realize their narrative might not be as funny to people who weren't in uniform either, so they end each chapter with a joke. Too bad most of them are of the "yuck yuck" variety.

John Zutz is a Milwaukee VVAW member.

Vietnam: A History of the War

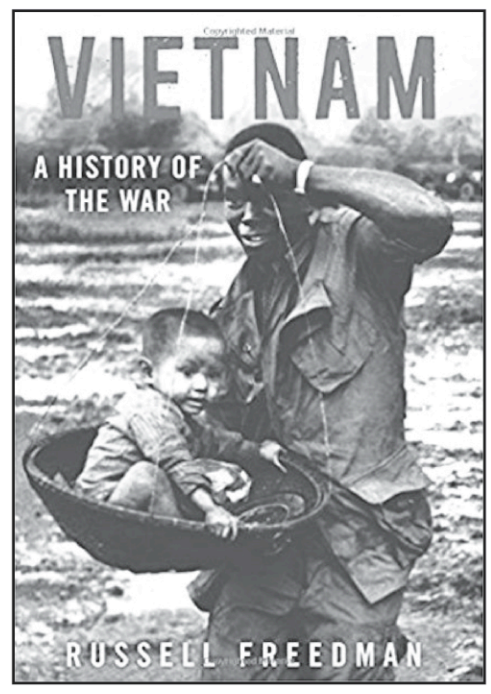
Allen Meece (reviewer)

Vietnam: A History of the War by Russell Freedman
(Holiday House, 2016)

This concise history book is a well-rounded insight into the 10-year-long atrocity of the "American War" in Vietnam. They gave it that name to distinguish it from their previous revolt against imperialism during the "French War." Both wars were manifestations of capitalist insane hatred for socialism and the Vietnam liberation movement because it stood for the common good of working-class citizens. After World War II, as it revolted against the post-war resumption of French colonialism, North VN fruitlessly asked America for help. VN's Prime Minister, Ho Chi Minh, figured the US would approve their anti-colonial revolution since that was exactly how America was started in 1776. Wrong. We may love freedom but recently we've been submitting to the over-control of the owning class much more.

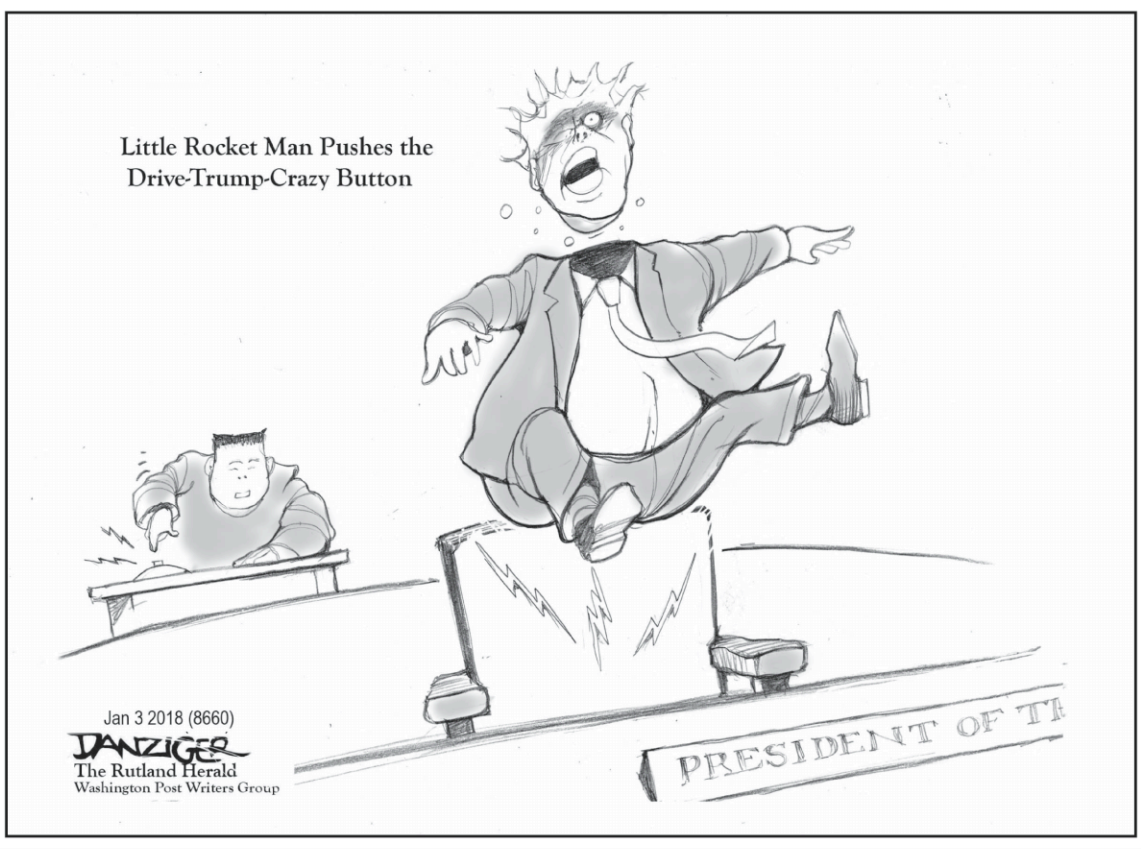
Our version of "help" was to sail in and set up a puppet government so that US corporations, not the local "socialists," would have first dibs on the country's raw materials, tungsten, and oil deposits. The resistance of the VN people was phenomenal and our troop build-up reached half a million but no dice. Didn't work. No winning. The only question became when to call off the invasion and leave them alone. Behind the political scene, the commercial US establishment, known to millions of war protesters as the "Power Structure," enforced the war until 1975. Then we just shipped out or flew away without apologizing for what we'd done.

Russell Freedman is an excellent writer who clarifies the politics of death. He writes in a conversational way without any academic babble so the reason for an extended, international crime becomes clear to the reader of his great summary. It was about money.



Allen Meece was a sonar technician on a destroyer offshore of Vietnam and has written a novel about a fictional Tonkin Gulf Incident titled "The Abel Mutiny," along with other books on Vietnam, available at Amazon.com.

Seaman Allen L. Meece on the Deck Force of USS Edwards, DD950, 1966, 4th from right, back row.



Blind Nation

John Ketwig (reviewer)

Blind Nation: How Ignorance and Arrogance Fueled Our Vietnam Involvement by Frank C. Nelson
(Nelsofrank Enterprises, 2012)

For many years, I've relied upon a 1985 book, *Backfire: A History of How American Culture Led Us Into Vietnam and Made Us Fight the Way We Did*, (William Morrow and Company) for in-depth analysis and understanding of the early years of America's involvement in Southeast Asia. That is still a treasured book, but now I will also rely upon this dynamite book by retired Navy Lieutenant Commander Nelson.

In his introduction, Nelson writes, "It is time to explore the largely unexamined history of our early involvement and learn the real lessons of Vietnam." He presents that history in an accessible and continuous fashion, communicating without resorting to exotic or mysterious words that might impress the reader with his prestigious vocabulary. His telling is clear and concise as he creates a scalding indictment of the political, military, and media personalities (American, French, and a wide variety of other international players), and the rigid boundaries within which they were required to work. The foundation of this book is the assertion that the French were cruel and heartless in their treatment of the Vietnamese, and Ho Chi Minh was a nationalist hoping to gain independence for his oppressed people, and not a Communist at all. Very few American diplomats or government officials were familiar with the situation in Southeast Asia after World War II, but they were indelibly influenced by the environment in Washington. Senator Joseph McCarthy was conducting high-profile hearings and accusing a wide variety of government and military leaders of being covert agents of Communism. Throughout our government and military, anyone in a position of responsibility had to be concerned that any action they might take could be questioned at the highest level.

Since Ho Chi Minh had visited Moscow and communicated with the Chinese communist leadership in Peking, he was certainly a commie, and his Viet Minh movement was obviously part of the communist plan to take over the world country by country. Vietnam was an unknown, backward, even primitive nation on the opposite side of the world, but if it fell to the communists, surely Cambodia, Thailand, Malaysia, Burma, New Zealand and Australia would be endangered. This "Domino Theory" failed to acknowledge that China and Vietnam had been bitter adversaries for centuries, or that Ho Chi Minh never claimed to be a communist. Failure to deal in facts from the first created decades of suffering and devastation throughout Southeast Asia, and a great deal of turmoil and distress here at home. *Blind Nation* does not go into detail beyond the assassination of President Kennedy, but we are all too familiar with the end results.

Frank Nelson describes the personalities and events of the Vietnam tragedy in convincing fashion. As the subtitle suggests, he tells a well-documented story of Americans who were blinded by their own ignorance and arrogance. As a result, somewhere in the vicinity of 3.5 million people died, the vast majority of them were Southeast Asian civilians caught in the crossfire.

The back cover of the book contends that "just before he died, super-hawk McGeorge Bundy admitted that 'the doves were right', and 'it was a war we should not have fought,' but that profound bit of introspection is being disregarded." (Note the present tense.) "Convinced that the US should not have "lost" that war, historians and future generals reprise the feel-good fantasies that got us into that mess 60 years ago. That is an unproductive process. Truly useful lessons can only be determined by confronting the realities, however painful, of that haunting experience, and accomplishing that is the purpose of this book." Have America's leaders taken their blinders off? We have waged war in Afghanistan for 17 years, to no avail. The Middle East is suffering in much the same way Southeast Asia suffered under American occupation. *Blind Nation* is available from Amazon, and I highly recommend that you get a copy and give its message every consideration.

John Ketwig is the author of ... and a hard rain fell: A G.I.'s True Story of the War in Vietnam, which remains in print after 32 years and 27 printings (Macmillan, 1985). John is a lifetime member of Vietnam Veterans Against the War.

The Vietnam I Remember

R G CANTALUPO

The Vietnam I Remember by Steven Curtis
(CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2017)

Over these many years, I've realized there are as many Vietnams as there were soldiers who spent a tour there. The Vietnam I remember as an RTO in an infantry company for the 25th Infantry from 1968-69, was a Vietnam filled with tragedy, trauma, and terror. It was my Vietnam, but it was only a snapshot in an enormously complex and multifarious war.

I never spent time with a "boom boom" girl.

I never befriended the Vietnamese, and the only real contact I made with civilians was on "search and destroy" missions, or tossing candy bars to kids as we were humping along Highway 1 from Trang Bang and back.

What I remember most is calling in 500 pounds and napalm bombs, or running to take cover from mortars, or snipers, or ambushes.

So it was with great surprise and pleasure to read Steven Curtis' *The Vietnam I Remember*, a book that describes with humor and illuminating detail and photographs a world that most of us missed or never saw.

On the front cover is a photograph of a group of smiling combat Marines interspersed with Vietnamese children.

On the back cover is a photograph of Steven Curtis cradling a Vietnamese baby in his arms.

Between these two iconic photographs, we discover Curtis' story written and photographed with tenderness, respect, and sardonic humor.

There's the harrowing experience of what it felt like to arrive in Da Nang on the first day of the Tet offensive, January 31, 1968. Curtis describes with a fine eye, the fear and chaos of those first few days in country, and what it felt like to be a newbie.

There's the heartbreaking and profound story of Bon Song, a young Vietnamese "boom boom" girl, who shows such affection and warmth for Curtis that he is overwhelmed by sadness and loneliness.

There are stories of birthdays, Dear John letters, the deaths of good buddies, R&R, a mascot named "Boner," the battle in Hue, racism, war trophies, politicians, Navy Corpsmen, and monsoon rain among others.

Each story is gifted with surprises, irony, tragedy, humor, and often profound insights about the war and human nature. And each is embellished and enhanced with terrific photographs that capture scenes and experiences with a keen photographic eye.

I can't say I loved reading Curtis' remembrances or gazing at his photos. It's hard to love revisiting a place and time filled with so many bittersweet memories and feelings.

But what I did love was Curtis' attempt to show us a Vietnam we've rarely seen, or have glossed over in our own tragic narratives of the war. And the balance, clarity, and humor in which he portrays through words and pictures the most common experiences of Vietnam veterans.

I highly recommend *The Vietnam I Remember* for anyone who wants to discover a larger, more well-rounded perspective of the American War. The combination of photos and narratives gives the book a cinematic feel to it, and the large format, 9" X 11", allows the reader a sense of space and openness that is rare among Vietnam memoirs.

RG CANTALUPO (ROSS CANTON) WAS AN RTO (RADIO OPERATOR) FOR AN INFANTRY COMPANY IN THE 25TH INFANTRY DIVISION, 1968-69. HE WAS AWARDED THREE PURPLE HEARTS AND A BRONZE STAR WITH A COMBAT V FOR VALOR FOR COURAGE UNDER FIRE. HIS MEMOIR, THE LIGHT WHERE SHADOWS END, WAS PUBLISHED IN MAY 2016.

Dewey Canyon IV, Washington, DC, May 12, 1982.

Autopsy of War: A Personal History

JOHN KETWIG (REVIEWER)

Autopsy of War: A Personal History by John A. Parrish, M.D.
(Thomas Dunne Books, an imprint of St. Martin's Press, 2012)

Right up front, I have to admit that I am an acquaintance of Dr. John Parrish. Back about 1983 I read his amazing first book, titled *12, 20, & 5: A Doctor's Year in Vietnam*. Published in 1972, it was one of the first of the first-person accounts of the war, a landmark accomplishment at that time. Dr. Parrish would introduce me to his literary agent, who became my first literary agent, and after my Vietnam memoir was published in 1985 we broke bread and spoke at a Veterans Day event at a Borders Book Shop in Framingham, Massachusetts. After that event, he invited my wife and me to his home where we enjoyed wine and crackers and a spirited conversation. Then my work no longer took me to the Boston area, and I lost track of Dr. Parrish until recently when his name came up in a phone conversation and I learned he had published a later book. Reading *Autopsy of War* helps me to understand that the doctor had been extremely busy over the years. In fact, this book is almost entirely the story of those years, influences from his childhood, and his compelling, frightening battle with PTSD.

Parrish was brought up in the home of a Southern Baptist preacher where "we were taught that Jews had a highly unfounded sense of entitlement, a relentless work ethic, and a selfish and manipulative gift for making money at the expense of others – it was no wonder the Germans were killing most of them. Otherwise, Germans and the "Japs" were the embodiment of evil and found great pleasure in torturing and killing Americans. Catholics were to be distantly tolerated even though they were pagan worshippers of Jesus's mother. Africans and Asians, if they did really exist, were pitiful, weird, ignorant people who were doomed to hell. Missionaries tried to save a few of them by telling them about Jesus, but it was a pretty hopeless task. Even though we were poor, our white, Christian privileged status was obvious to all, and only we had the comfort of being in God's grace." He was expected to become a Baptist preacher like his father, but when he escaped from the family home to attend college he discovered a fascination with science and human physiology. He dared to interact with a member of the opposite sex and to try smoking and drinking. He applied to Yale medical school and was accepted. Upon completion of that program, he took his wife and infant daughter to Michigan where he would do his residency and internship in internal medicine. His second daughter was born, and then the draft intervened in his life. He applied for a commission as an officer. In July 1967, he reported to Camp Pendleton for orientation before assignment to Vietnam. He would work in the Phu Bai area, often in the field.

"Eventually," he writes, "all the wounds began to look similar. I couldn't process all the sights and sounds. I could only incorporate certain fragments. A total embrace of all I witnessed was not necessary, practical, or, for me, even possible. I was overloaded, yet my job required me to remain focused and efficient. The mangled flesh, the stench, the sounds of pain, the faces, the individuality and sacredness of each boy were blurred and partially buried as I let in only enough information to do my work and provide first aid and comfort to the wounded soldiers."

Autopsy of War is not really about the war. Dr. Parrish came home and, not wanting to see the insides of any more bodies, became a dermatologist. Ultimately, he became a Distinguished Professor of Dermatology and head of the Dermatology Department at Harvard Medical School and Massachusetts General Hospital. He was General Hospital to work with soldiers suffering from PTSD and traumatic brain injuries. "The problem we face," he writes, "bluntly put, is this: Despite the best intentions and efforts of our government, the two ongoing American wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are creating more disabled men and women than the present DOD and VA health care systems can treat and help to assimilate into a healthy family, society, or career."

Dr. Parrish is an overachiever. It is a common symptom of PTSD. But he is also a hero, a simple and good man obsessed with helping his fellow human beings. His story is touching, sometimes all too familiar, informative, and ultimately inspiring. It is hopeful, a tale of humanity and accomplishment despite the odds. There are used copies available on Amazon, or from ABEbooks.com. I highly recommend this book, especially if you are personally familiar with PTSD. *Autopsy of War* may be just what the doctor ordered.

JOHN KETWIG IS THE AUTHOR OF ... AND A HARD RAIN FELL: A G.I.'S TRUE STORY OF THE WAR IN VIETNAM, WHICH REMAINS IN PRINT AFTER 32 YEARS AND 27 PRINTINGS (MACMILLAN, 1985). A NEW BOOK, VIETNAM RECONSIDERED: THE WAR, THE TIMES, AND WHY THEY MATTER, IS SLATED FOR PUBLICATION EARLY IN 2019. JOHN IS A LIFETIME MEMBER OF VIETNAM VETERANS AGAINST THE WAR.

If I Die Before I Wake: During Tet 1968 and After

R G CANTALUPO

An excerpt from a new memoir by rg cantalupo

A moonless night, dark, so dark.

Red and green tracers streak by a few inches above my head.

Bullets smash into sandbags around our makeshift mortar pit, splash bits of sand and debris onto my face.

Mud drenches my back. Chills run up my spine.

I tear charges off a 60-millimeter mortar round, hand the cool, metal round to Baby San lying beside me.

His soft, sweaty fingers touch mine as he grabs the fin.

Mortar explosions walk toward us.

The first explodes about 30 meters away.

Then, one by one, each bursts a little closer.

The ground trembles and quakes.

Fiery clods of rice paddy mud hail down upon me.

"Two! Two!" Mike screams and sights the mortar tube toward enemy mortar flashes flaring from the black horizon.

My fingers quicken, tear off eight charges leaving two.

Two! Fuck! Fuuuck!

Two hundred meters.

We're gonna be overrun.

I turn, reach over, slide another round out of the ammo crate.

An RPG explodes near my head, knocks me sideways into the sandbags we've stacked four high to make our pit.

Red-hot shrapnel stabs into my ear and along the side of my head.

I turn to hand Baby San the round, and blood streams down over my eyes.

"Fuuuck!!!"

"You...okay?" Baby San whispers.

"One!" Mike screams! "One!"

I turn, grab another round, tear off nine charges, and pass a bloody mortar into his hands.

Another RPG whistles past.

A mortar explodes.

Then another.

And another.

Each one walking a little farther from our pit.

Twenty meters away, on the perimeter, I hear screams.

"MEDIC!!! MEDIC!!! MEDIC!!!"

I swivel, grab two more rounds, tear the charges off with my blood-smeared hands, pass them to Baby San.

I can't see.

I can't open my eyes for the blood streaming down.

I grab rounds as blood slides down my forehead, over my eyes, and onto my neck and chest.

Terror rises in my chest like a caged beast.

I tear off charges, hand the rounds to Baby San, who hands the rounds to Lee, who guides the rounds into the tube, as Mike stares out into the dark.

He sights in on an enemy mortar flash, gauges the distance, the range, the direction, adjusts the tube, shouts "ONE!!! ONE!!!"

I tear off charges and hand Baby San the rounds.

Blood trickles down my ribcage, over my belly, and into my groin; blood runs down the back of my neck, feels like a centipede crawling along my spine.

I wipe the blood out of my eyes, but it keeps streaming down.

I need to get Baby San more rounds.

The burning spreads from my ear to around the side and back of my head.

I bite back the pain, break off charges two rounds at a time.

Feet zigzag past.

Charlie?! Fuck! Fuck!!!

I throw two more rounds onto my belly, rip off nine charges, and pass the rounds.

"Five more!!!" Mike commands. "Now! Now!!!"

Lee frantically throws rounds into the mortar tube: Poomph! Poomph! Poomph! Poomph! Poomph!

A few feet outside our pit, a mortar explodes.

Shrapnel, flesh, and debris hail down upon us.

A scream. A groan.

A long, baying moan.

Ooooooooh…Oooh…Oooh…Ooooooooh.…

I turn to hand Baby San another round.

A searing pain shoots up my left arm.

Darkness bleeds to dim light.

I am nineteen.

I am in a hospital in Yokohama, Japan.

I am not who I remember.

In the bed beside me, a man moans.

He moans like an animal, like a dog run over by a car lying along the side of a road.

Two enormous purple black eyes punctuate his face.

But there are no bandages on his body, no bloody gauze wrapped around his head like mine.

Probably a percussion wound, a high-intensity explosion too close to his head. Brain trauma. Air particles propelled so fast and hard they shot through his skull and jellied his brain.

Aces and eights, man. That's all this war deals—Aces and eights every hand.

I wonder if he'll ever wake, or if his brain is too filled with holes.

Luck. Dumb fucking bad luck.

And something else, something that I saw yesterday when they were turning him from one position to the other.

A small wound, maybe a half an inch long, at the base of his neck.

One tiny piece of shrapnel—that's all it took to sever his spine, to paralyze his body from the neck down.

Aces and eights, man. Nothing but aces and eights all the way down the line.

He moans and moans.

He wants to scratch out his eyes, to dig into his eye sockets and tear out the pain throbbing in his head.

But he can't.

His arms are bound, strapped to the bed.

Every two hours someone comes to rotate him 180 degrees.

Each time someone comes, his moans rise to a crescendo.

Each time they leave, his moans die out to a dull bay like a wounded water buffalo.

I call him Panda.

In the Head Ward's black night, when I hear the shuffling feet of the somnambulant moving through the ward, his moans give content and context to my terror dreams.

I see Panda's purple-black eyes wide-open, blank, empty as bullet holes in the night ward's dusk—eyes that haunt me like the eyes of the undead—a ghost's eyes gazing into a tomorrow that will never come.

Panda.

Panda's enormous purple-splotched eyes ethereal in the waking ward.

RG CANTALUPO, (ROSS CANTON), IS A POET, PLAYWRIGHT, FILMMAKER, NOVELIST, AND DIRECTOR. HIS WORK HAS BEEN PUBLISHED WIDELY IN LITERARY JOURNALS IN THE UNITED STATES, ENGLAND, AND AUSTRALIA. HE SERVED IN THE 25TH INFANTRY DIVISION AS AN RTO FOR AN INFANTRY COMPANY FROM 1968-69 AND RECEIVED THREE PURPLE HEARTS AND A BRONZE STAR WITH A COMBAT V FOR VALOR UNDER FIRE.

What Did I Fight For?

A year in Vietnam, among active four
Hot dusty or muddy, the four seasons tour
With luck I came back, but others did not
Their names on a wall, to not be forgot

Told it's for freedom in lies strong and bold
Equality for everyone the bill of goods sold.
But t'was for the rich who owned Companies
With profiteers' pitches full of bold-faced lies

What did I fight for those long years ago?
For the rich not for freedom I now know.
We must all act now to free our country
From an evil and perverse plutocracy

Forward we go thirty years and more
To more Asian wars for freedom they swore
The Intel was cooked, to bolster their lies
E-mails deleted, kept from public eyes

Fifteen years more and an end to progress
Tsar in the White House, brown shirts in Congress
Our values betrayed, the setting for war
I must not forget. What did I fight for?

I thought 'twas freedom to keep us all free
But 'twas corporatism so the rich make money
It's the working class with boots on the ground
Whose blood pays for war not the rich, I found

What did I fight for those long years ago?
For the rich not for freedom I now know.
We must all act now to free our country
From an evil and perverse plutocracy

And to honor those who here they are not
Their names on a wall, to not be forgot

—Bruce H. Hendrickson

50th Anniverary - My Lai Student Performers, Vietnam, March 16, 2018.

Where We Came From, Who We Are, Who Can Join

Vietnam Veterans Against the War, Inc. (VVAW) is a national veterans' organization that was founded in New York City in 1967 after six Vietnam vets marched together in a peace demonstration. It was organized to voice the growing opposition among returning servicemen and women to the still-raging war in Indochina, and grew rapidly to a membership of over 30,000 throughout the United States, including active duty GIs stationed in Vietnam. Through ongoing actions and grassroots organization, VVAW exposed the ugly truth about US involvement in Southeast Asia and our first-hand experiences helped many other Americans to see the unjust nature of that war.

VVAW also took up the struggle for the rights and needs of veterans. In 1970, we began the first rap groups to deal with traumatic aftereffects of war, setting the example for readjustment counseling at vet centers today. We exposed the shameful neglect of many disabled vets in VA hospitals and helped draft legislation to improve educational benefits and create job programs. VVAW fought for amnesty for war resisters, including vets with bad discharges. We helped make known the negative health effects of exposure to chemical defoliants and the VA's attempts to cover up these conditions as well as their continued refusal to provide treatment and compensation for many Agent Orange victims.

Today our government still finances and arms undemocratic and repressive regimes around the world in the name of "democracy." American troops have again been sent into open battle in the Middle East and covert actions in Latin America, for many of the same misguided reasons that were used to send us to Southeast Asia. Meanwhile, many veterans from all eras are still denied justice—facing unemployment, discrimination, homelessness, post-traumatic stress disorder and other health problems, while already inadequate services are cut back or eliminated.

We believe that service to our country and communities did not end when we were discharged. We remain committed to the struggle for peace and for social and economic justice for all people. We will continue to oppose senseless military adventures and to teach the real lessons of the Vietnam War. We will do all we can to prevent future generations from being put through a similar tragedy, and we will continue to demand dignity and respect for veterans of all eras. This is real patriotism and we remain true to our mission. Anyone who supports this overall effort, whether Vietnam veteran or not, veteran or not, may join us in this long-term struggle. JOIN US!

created by Robert Spicher

Insignia of Vietnam Veterans Against the War

We took the MACV patch as our own, replacing the sword with the upside-down rifle with helmet, the international symbol of soldiers killed in action. This was done to expose the lies and hypocrisy of US aggression in Vietnam as well as its cost in human lives. The original MACV insignia also put forward lies. The US military was not protecting (the sword) the Vietnamese from invasion from the People's Republic of China (the China Gates), but was instead trying to "save" Vietnam from itself.

Our insignia has come to represent veterans fighting against new "adventures" like the Vietnam War, while at the same time fighting for a decent way of life for veterans and their families.

Our insignia is over 46 years old. The insignia, VVAW® and Vietnam Veterans Against the War, Inc.® are registered trademarks belonging to VVAW and no other organization or group may use it for any reason without written permission from the VVAW Board of Directors.

Beware of VVAW-AI

This notice is to alert you to a handful of individuals calling themselves the "Vietnam Veterans Against the War Anti-Imperialist" (VVAW-AI). VVAW-AI is actually the creation of an obscure ultraleft sect, designed to confuse people in order to associate themselves with VVAW's many years of activism and struggle. They are not a faction, caucus or part of VVAW, Inc. and are not affiliated with us in any way. We urge all people and organizations to beware of this bogus outfit.

SUPPORT VVAW!
DONATE OR JOIN TODAY!

Vietnam Veterans Against the War, Inc.
VVAW Membership
P.O. Box 355
Champaign, IL 61824-0355

Membership Application

Name _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____
Phone _____
Email address _____
Branch _____
Dates of Service (if applicable) _____
Unit _____
Military Occupation _____
Rank _____
Overseas Duty _____
Dates _____

☐ Yes, add me to the VVAW email list.
☐ I do not wish to join, but wish to make a donation to the work of VVAW.
☐ Sign me up for a lifetime membership in VVAW. $250 is enclosed.

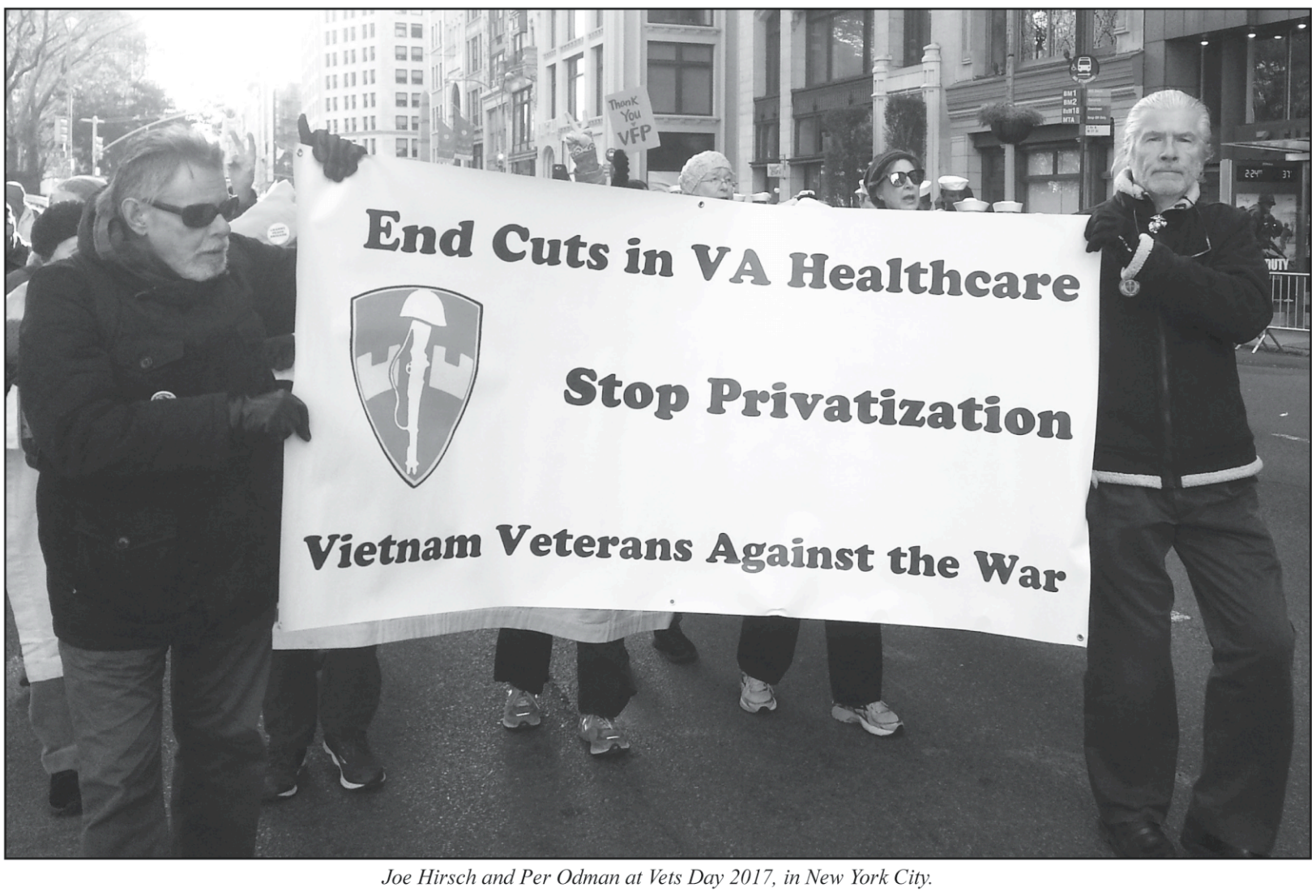
Membership in VVAW is open to ALL people who want to build a veterans' movement that fights for peace and justice and support the work of VVAW and its historic legacy. Most of our members are veterans of the Vietnam era, but we welcome veterans of all eras, as well as family members and friends to our ranks. The annual membership fee is $25.00 (not required of homeless, unemployed or incarcerated vets).

Signature _____

Date _____

Total Amount Enclosed _____

Make checks payable to VVAW. Contributions are tax-deductible.



Joe Hirsch and Per Odman at Vets Day 2017, in New York City.

RECOLLECTIONS

I Couldn't Escape '68

Jim Wohlgemuth

I am sure many of us are feeling those pangs of memory, those anxieties of wartime experiences as the 50th anniversary of Vietnam continues and drags unmercifully through the sanitation of time and Ken Burns. To some of you, your anniversaries have come and gone and I am sure you are well done with it. For me, mine is about to start, the fiftieth anniversary of 1968.

Fifty years ago I was partying through a year at Drexel Institute of Technology as I squandered my 2S deferment.

In January I saw the news about the Tet, I saw the extent, the power, and the commitment of the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong and knew LBJ's optimism was unfounded. When peace candidate Gene McCarthy challenged LBJ in the New Hampshire primary and almost won, I felt good, maybe there might be peace and Vietnam would end. Johnson pulls out, in comes Bobby and I am thinking that there is truly going to be a peace candidate. OK, I can try to ride out the year at Drexel and transfer to a different school and maybe a new President could end the nightmare in Vietnam.

One warm April afternoon after seeing a movie with friends, I headed back on the train to Drexel. The train was noticeably quiet. No one was speaking. We got to the dorm and there was a crowd around the TV, Dr. King had been assassinated. I saw the smoke rise over Philadelphia.

June school was almost over. How would I explain my dismal performance to my parents? I started to go to sleep one evening when a friend burst into the room to say Bobby had been shot. I lay back down, too stunned to be saddened. The sadness would come. I was numb. I just wanted my parents to come get me and take me back to Western Pennsylvania, back to our home in the woods, back to the safety of my childhood.

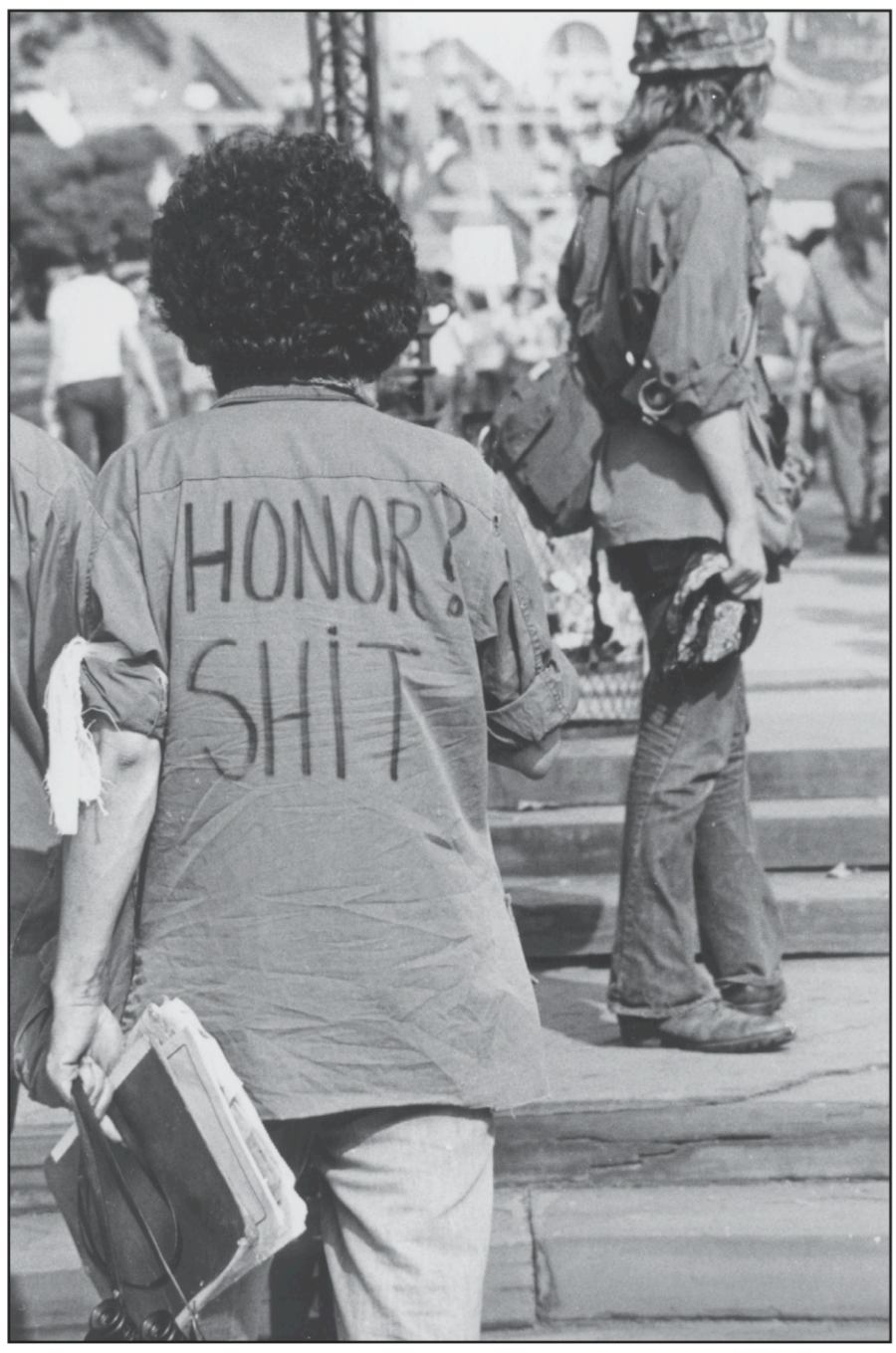
I remember very little about that summer except sitting, just sitting. My mom got me a job in her office and she took me to work each day. I befriended a member of the Young Democrats who invited me to the Pennsylvania state convention. It was fun so he said let's go to the national convention in Chicago. I declined, I didn't think it would amount to much. Until it did. I watched the horror of the police brutality on the student protesters thinking to myself I am so glad I didn't go. Then again, shouldn't I have gone?

My grades came in the mail and my parents, I suspect, were too disappointed to even say anything. One afternoon my Mom sat me down and gave brochures for the Air Force and the Navy. We had one of those conversations that I knew I had better say nothing. I had put myself in this position and now Mom was going to push me out of it.

I went to the Navy recruiter. I took an aptitude test. The recruiter told me of all the jobs that were available to me. I just wanted to stay away from Vietnam. I told the recruiter I had relatives in England and would like a ship where I could visit them. I said I liked the idea of a destroyer, whatever that was. The recruiter smiled, nodded and assured me that my test scores would let me pick my duty. I was offered delayed entry. I would join on December 16, 1968. I went home to sit, think, and count the days.

I remember Jose Feliciano's Star Spangled Banner at the World Series and John Carlos and Tommy Smith raising their fists at the Olympics. I remember the Nixon election. I remember the evening news about Vietnam. I felt the reality of the situation crowding me, suffocating me. Then came December 16, 1968.

The morning was Western Pennsylvania cold. Snow was on the ground but not in the air. I had to be to the Federal Building by 6 am. My Dad drove and my Mom was in the front seat directly in front of me. I remember images but no thoughts. No one said a word, not a word. We arrived at the Federal Building, I grabbed the bag my Mom had packed for me and got out. There were some sheepish smiles of resolution and a handshake and hugs. The guidance to be careful and to write. My Dad had enjoyed the Army so he was confident that I would be alright. My Mom, a war bride from England was doing her stiff upper lip with a Mother's smile. I walked to the Federal Building and in the door. I don't remember taking another breath for days, maybe months. I know I must have. My Mom would later tell me that if I had turned around she would have called me back and we would have figured something else out. I wish I had, but I am glad I didn't. I am here.



That was my 1968, a year where I was confronted with a reality that would unnerve and challenge me to my core, but thanks to the foresight and fortitude of my Mom and the confidence of my Dad, I made it through and because I made it through that year I knew that I actually could be the navigator of a future that I would make. But please, these memories of that year have a rawness that to this day will upset my stomach and generate an anxiousness that forces me to reach for another beer. So when I see those magazines commemorating 1968 I either turn them around or I mention to the checkout clerk how upsetting it is to see it. That then generates the blank stare and the inevitable question, "Do you want your chicken in a plastic bag?" Damn it '68.

Oh, that destroyer in the North Atlantic ended up being an LST off the Mekong Delta.

Jim Wohlgemuth joined the Navy in 1968 and served on the USS Westchester County LST 1167 from '69 to '71, and homeported in Yokosuka. He was a radarman. He also served from '71 to '72 on the USS Point Defiance LSD 31. He got an early out to go to college in September 1972. He is now retired and a member of VVAW and Veterans for Peace, trying to share the futility of militarism.